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THE STORY
OF
ELEANOR LAMBERT

[Cape, Harriet M.] 107. 201

MAGDALEN BROOKE [1891]

NEW YORK
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THE STORY OF ELEANOR LAMBERT.

I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

*"For kind
Calm years, exacting their accompt
Of pain, mature the mind."*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

FAR away in the depths
of the country, in the
very heart of England,
where green meadows
stretch their length
under the shade of
mighty trees, so far from the
strong sea-winds of the coast that
they have leisure to grow to their
full height and girth erect to the

skies; where the deep lanes are a glory of wild rose, honeysuckle, traveler's joy, wild convolvulus and briony in their season, and where the wild strawberries, the delight of children, run riot on the banks;—down in this land of peace and gentle, homely beauty, there stands a long, low, red-brick house, called from time out of mind High Trees, perhaps because the great elms which are the glory of its smiling fields and pleasant gardens were famous even before the ancestors of its present owners built the long irregular brick house which kept their name.

The house consists of but two stories, and the kitchens and offices run back at one end apart, cool and shady, and ending in the dairy with its delicious shadowed light and freshness, scented with the rich yellow cream as it rises in the broad red pans;—a place to dream of under the fierce suns of the tropics.

On the ground floor, the rooms, unlike those of many houses built at about the same period, are large, though a little low-pitched; with wide, small-paned windows fitted with seats on which one may dream away a happy hour as one gazes over the old garden, with its soft, mossy turf, its whispering larches and firs, and its borders of damask and Provence roses, mignonette, candy-tuft, and all sweet, old-fashioned flowers; where the bees hum at their much-belauded industry, while the irresponsible butterflies poise and hover over each blossom in turn, to alight at length, like some flattered beauty, where they can best show off the marvellous, dainty perfection of their form and color.

From the perfumed flower-garden you pass by a short path bordered with currant bushes—thus making an easy descent into a more prosaic world—to the walled kitchen-garden with its old-world iron gate.

Prosaic, did I say?

That old walled garden, with its homely vegetables and its fruit-trees, is a fairyland of beauty and color.

Not to speak of its border of roses, carnations, poppies, orange escholzias, and purple and white Michaelmas daisies, who could paint properly the stately grove of Jerusalem artichokes, the feathery plumes of the asparagus, the glorious tints of the carrot-leaves as the year draws on, the crimson and purple of the beet-root—nay, even the magic tints of the common cabbage?

One might wander for days in that warm and enchanted paradise of household vegetables, and ever discover new beauties.

Then the beds of sweet herbs! The sage with its soft-felted leaf of cold gray-green; the thyme in flower—one mass of dim purple, over which the bees and flies sing unending pæans—the mint with its strong, green shoots and penetrating scent!

To be in that old garden on a sweet summer day, while the soft wind played in the trees, and the little white clouds sailed miles above in the blue sky, was to be reconciled with life and to believe in the restoration of all things to their original destiny.

Round about the gardens lie the meadows, divided by hedges, where large trees stand up at intervals; peaceful, happy fields, in which the grass grew to harvest and the hay was mown by the mower's scythe, and made and stacked by the farm-servants and the house-servants, while master and mistress gave a willing helping hand.

Some thirty-five years ago the possessor of the old house was a maiden lady of mature years, the only remaining member of the somewhat numerous family of the late Mr. Escote of High Trees, whose death, some five years before, had left his daughter and dear companion his sole

heiress; the property passing at her death—since she was unmarried—to a distant cousin, an Escote of another branch.

Mr. Escote of High Trees had married, very early in life, a beautiful girl, some years older than himself, and of extremely delicate constitution.

It had not been a very happy marriage, for Mrs. Escote's delicacy, which gave a fictitious gentleness and softness to her manner, was by no means a true index of her character, while this very delicacy of health was a tremendous engine of power; for who but a brute—and Mr. Escote was the most tender-hearted of men—could insist on having his own way, even in matters of importance, to the sound of a perpetual plaintive moan over his cruelty to such a sufferer as she?

Moreover he loved the beautiful sufferer, and felt so keenly her goodness in marrying him—although, as she had been a

penniless orphan living with an extremely disagreeable uncle, it was difficult for others to see where the goodness lay—that he could not be hard on her. Her love for him, never very strong, and consisting principally of appreciation of his worship of her and of his worldly advantages, dwindled, as the years of peevish invalidism on the one side and of patient kindness on the other, went on, into the merest thread of remembered sentiment.

Of their five children, all except Anne, the eldest-born, inherited their mother's weak constitution and died in infancy or early childhood. In Mr. Escote's great love for his ailing wife, he hid deep down in his large heart the grief the successive loss of each little cherished fair-haired lad or lass caused him;—for must not the mother's grief be deeper far than his?

And yet it may be doubted, for the "grief that does not speak" wastes no power in out-

ward expression, but uses all its weapons to rend its hiding-place.

Mrs. Escote lamented her losses loudly, and as if they were but part and parcel of the conspiracy of things in general to add to her sufferings; but it was noticeable that while her husband's heart clung to their sole remaining child with a passion of love and tenderness that he did not strive to conceal, the mother seemed rather to resent in her the health and strength which had preserved her from the fate of her four little brothers and sisters, and as she grew older and developed a wholesome robustness and sturdy will of her own, was often heard to exclaim that she could not imagine how *she* could ever have had a great rough child like that—it was unfortunate that Anne took so entirely after her father! This last accusation was undoubtedly true, for Anne, instead of inheriting Mrs. Escote's slender, swaying figure, her

beautiful features and fragile bloom, was tall and large, and formed for strength rather than grace, like her father, from whom she had also inherited the clear, true gray eyes, shaded by dark curling lashes—the only beauty of either face.

When Anne was about eighteen, her mother's fretful wail of life wore itself slowly away into silence, and tended and comforted in the last dread days by the same unchanging love of her husband—which somehow seemed to grow more precious now that it could hold her so little longer—and nursed by the capable and willing hands of the daughter, whose health and strength seemed now to have some virtue in them, the poor woman sank quietly to rest.

Mr. Escote mourned his wife with the sorrow of a faithful heart which finds in itself all the springs of loss. He forgot in her all but his own love for the beautiful wife of his youth and

the bereaved mother of his dead babies; while his tenderness for his daughter seemed, if possible, to grow even greater now that she was the sole living recipient of it.

In the years that passed before his death—at which time his daughter was past middle life—the companionship between them grew ever closer and closer. Their tastes were the same, their sympathies alike; their opinions differing enough at times to rouse discussion, which their common basis of moral nature kept from any touch of bitterness or malice; and when he died, she lost father, dearest friend, staunchest comrade, in one.

Into Anne Escote's peaceful life but one great heart trouble had come, and that wound had so long healed over that now it only ached at times with an indefinite pain that was like the ache of life itself. The wound had been given so long ago, and

the giver had proved so unworthy, that it was more a lament over the dear lost sentiment than the lost lover.

When Anne was in her twenty-first year, a far-away cousin, whom she had not seen since he was a schoolboy, having returned invalided from India, was invited to spend part of his sick-leave at High Trees, and the natural result speedily followed. Anne, with her vigorous health and plain face, was attracted at once by the handsome invalid, who let her wait upon him hand and foot, thanking her with honeyed phrases, while he dawdled away a pleasant summer in that delicious paradise of garden and meadow.

They sat in the walled fruit-garden, he reading poetry to her when the fancy seized him—he had a pretty taste for verse—while she plucked for him the ripest strawberries, or hanging bunches of the beautiful pale pink Champagne currants from

the bush which had been looked upon as her especial property since her babyhood.

How was she to know that Captain Dick Lambert had said as pretty things to a score of others before she ever set eyes on him, or had looked with those appealing blue eyes of his into as many ladies' faces with much the same expression, sure of obtaining an answering flutter in the heart of each?

However, in this case Captain Lambert really meant business, for Miss Escote was an heiress in her way; and an extravagant and impecunious younger son, with but a small allowance beyond his pay, must not be too particular—though the girl certainly was plain and awkward.

Still, since he could not hope to get High Trees without her, he must make up his mind to it so he proposed in form, and was accepted with joy and tender worship by the woman who thought it wonderful that such

resplendent hero should love her, and who was worth a million of such as she.

Then there came a season—alas! a short and fleeting season—of happiness; and then—Mr. Escote, in one of his rare visits to London, heard rumors of his intended son-in-law's doings which aroused suspicions in his mind, suspicions but too forcibly proved to be correct; and after weeks of agonized revolt against the horrible truth and wild struggles to believe still in her hero's tarnished fame, during which even her father seemed to be her enemy, Anne's brave mind consented to face the hard facts, and the unworthy lover was dismissed, and even his name passed away into silence as of the grave.

After events proved the decision to have been the only right one, and as the years went on, the thought of her lover's unworthiness, although in one way it poisoned the wound, in

another helped the high-souled woman to recover, and years before her father's death left her desolate, the thought of Richard Lambert had become but a rare visitant.





II.

LOVE'S LEGACY.

*"Who made shall mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend."*

—ROBERT BROWNING.



NE bright morning, early in February, five years after her father's death, Miss Escote sat in her cheerful morning-room, an open letter in her hand, and a very unusual expression of trouble on her kindly countenance.

Time, which "delves the parallels of beauty's brow," had dealt gently with Anne Escote's homely face. The passage of years and a life's experience had softened the somewhat hard out-

lines of her youth, and the honest, clear gray eyes looked out upon the world as frankly as in her girlhood, but with less disdain of what might fall short of her approval, and more tenderness for grief and pain and the thousand natural shocks of life.

The room she sat in was upstairs, leading by one door into her bedroom and by another into the long polished oak corridor which ran along the upper story of the old house. It was a comfortable, cosy retreat, dedicated to her use for reading, working, housekeeping duties, and practising—for Miss Escote was a fine performer on the pianoforte — ever since her mother's death had made her mistress of the house. A bright fire of wood and coal burned on the low hearth, and the winter sunshine fell with a clear, cheerful radiance across the old oak floor with its Turkey carpet. Outside, the garden and country were an enchanted winter Eden.

There had been a thick, white mist in the night, followed by a sharp frost, and now every branch and twig of the great trees was thickly rimmed with hoar-frost, whose minute crystals sparkled like diamonds in the sun; the edge of each evergreen leaf wore the same gleaming white circlet, and every blade of grass on the smooth lawn had turned into a stiff and shining little white spear. Against the pale blue sky, opposite the sun, whose rays lighted them into radiance, the high trees stood up in the misty wintry atmosphere, with which their delicate frost-laden tracery mingled in a delicious haze of white and palest, purest blue, as in an enchanted dream.

Some small domestic incident had made Miss Escote late that morning for her usually punctual eight o'clock breakfast, and she had left her letters for quiet reading in her sitting-room.

There were two or three, and of these it so happened that the

last she opened was the only one of any importance; but just that last letter was destined to alter the whole course of her solitary life.

The writing on its cover woke some unformed hint of memory in her mind, but still she failed to recognize it, and opened it without any thrill of sentiment.

Yet she had once prized, and laughed, and wept over a slim packet of love-letters in that very handwriting — before dissipation and degradation had altered its character.

“Dear Cousin Nancy,” the letter began, and Anne’s hand dropped with it on to her knee, and her eyes gazed blankly out into the garden, while her heart gave a throb that would have become it in her youth.

“Nancy!” She had not heard the name—given to her by her cousin and lover to modify what he called the stiffness of her own plain one—for nearly thirty years. No one else had ever called her

Nancy, but the little word bridged over the great gulf of grief and loss and time that lay between the present and that brief dream of happiness, and brought girlish tears to her eyes.

Outside the window, high up among the bare branches of an elm tree, a robin was singing the blithe carol which rejoices the heart of winter; but Anne's ears were deaf to her favorite songster as her eyes were unwitting of the pageant of white beauty spread out before them.

Instead of the white world around her, she saw a garden—a kitchen garden, but the Garden of Paradise all the same—full of summer sunshine and the fragrance of flower and fruit, and therein a man and a woman—could it ever have been herself?—and instead of the robin's winter song she heard the infinitely sweeter music of her lover's avowal of his love—to Nancy.

And she forgot all that had come after—his worthlessness,

his disloyalty—everything; and, bowing her head, she laid her pure lips to the paper and kissed the dear old words for the old love's sake. The foolish action brought her to herself, and she wiped her eyes and went on with the letter quietly.

“DEAR COUSIN NANCY: Though you have not much reason to remember me with affection, I write to you because you are—or were, anyhow—about the best woman it has ever been my luck to meet, and I am dead beat at last. I am not quite such a cur as to ask *you* for help for myself, but my wife is a good girl, and if after I am gone you would be a friend to her, it would ease my last days on earth.

“RICHARD LAMBERT.”

His wife! Dick Lambert's wife! How strange it seemed!

Miss Escote had heard rumors

of her cousin's doings at wide intervals during the past years—rumors but little to his credit—reports of gambling, drinking, and worse; tales of debt, and disgrace with his own people, with no brighter side of the picture to justify her old belief in the fascinating soldier. But of a wife she had heard nothing, and she concluded that the marriage must have been a recent one, since he spoke of his wife as a girl.

Why, he must be a man of five-and-fifty now! Would she know him if she saw him? Had all the light gone from the blue eyes which stole her heart away of old? And he was ill, dying perhaps, and in poverty. Dick dying, and she so strong and well, and full of life!

She rose, a sudden determination of purpose shining in her eyes, and rang the bell. Hannah Print, her chief serving-maid, a model of propriety and virtuous self-importance, answered it.

"Hannah," said Miss Escote, "I am going to London by the mid-day train."

"To London, ma'am!" echoed Hannah, in a tone of respectful but determined expostulation. "You'll catch your death of cold in them draughty trains this freezing day."

"I hope not," said her mistress, "but anyhow I must go. Pack me a few necessaries as quickly as possible, like a good soul, while I speak to Clarke." (Clarke was Miss Escote's factotum.)

"Do you think of staying any length of time, Miss Anne?" went on the precise Hannah, with a still stronger hint of disapproval in her thin voice; for Miss Escote's ways were, as a rule, those of order and propriety, and such an inversion of them as a sudden and unprepared-for visit to London was not to be passed over without comment. On such occasions Hannah, whose precision and prudishness concealed

a deep love and respect for the mistress she was growing old with, expected to feel all the importance of lady's-maid and confidential attendant. It was she who settled what garments her mistress ought to take with her, who saw to her wraps and luggage, and generally gave herself such airs as who would say, "Keep in your places, you ignorant country wenches who are not going to the gay metropolis;" as were wont to move the younger and less respectful of the maids to speak tartly of "that ridiculous old Hannah! there ain't no a-bearing of her! as if anybody in London would look at *her*!"

"Will you require me, ma'am, to accompany you?"

Anne thought a moment, and then said, gently, to soothe her handmaiden's easily roused pride:

"Not this time, I think, Hannah; my stay is so uncertain. It may be only for a night, or at

most two, so I think it is scarcely worth while."

Hannah sniffed.

"Oh, of course, Miss Anne, you know best," she said, stiffly, and was silent, and then set about her preparations for her mistress's journey with an air of virtuous resignation that made Anne smile in spite of a heavy heart.

The early winter darkness had fallen, and the morning of enchantment in the country ended in a cold clinging fog in London, when Miss Escote, having left her light luggage at her hotel, set forth in a four-wheeled cab to seek the address in a small street at Camberwell which Captain Lambert had given in his letter.

Of all modes of conveyance there is perhaps none which lends itself less to the comfortable journeying of an afflicted spirit. To a heart feasting on its own joy, or a mind sunk in apathetic indolence, there are perchance

alleviations in their own conditions to the discomforts of the vehicle; but to the soul in grief or suspense, filled with a sick longing to reach the end of the journey and its goal—if only a terrible certainty—the slow jog-trot, the ceaseless rattle of the ill-constructed window-panes, the perpetual slipping of small packages off the sloping back seat—all form at last a maddening weariness, which moralists may condemn, while they suffer from it.

At last, however, the sorry steed drew up before a mean-looking little house—number 20 in a row of fifty—each one so exactly the facsimile of its neighbor that it seemed wonderful the owners should have any definite idea of proprietorship, and Anne, paying the cab-driver about double his fare, which he demanded from a shrewd conviction that the lady was not a Londoner, and would not know the difference, went up the steep,

dirty steps, and knocked at the door.

A dull pain was at her heart, mingled with the nervous agitation which the thought of the nearness of the man whose presence had once set her pulses wildly beating, aroused within her.

A longish interval passed before there came any response, and she knocked again, still without effect.

Then she heard a door open and a woman's voice call pettishly, "Mrs. Smith!" Mrs. *Smith*! there's somebody knocked twice!"

Mrs. Smith must apparently have heard the second summons, and, thinking it the first, made no hurry to answer it, after the manner of her hard-worked and over-driven class.

Anne heard her voice as she came along the passage grumbling at the unreasonableness of visitors in general, and of this one in particular, for thinking

that she had nothing to do all day but answer that "dratted door."

Her heart sank at the mean surroundings, and a half hope glanced through her mind that it might prove a wrong address, and that she might be spared the sight of her old love in such company.

The door opened, and a stout, ill-dressed woman, with dark, coarse hair waving on her forehead in that stiff yet greasy style which is affected by so many women of the lodging-house-keeping class, stood in the narrow entry. She had probably been prepared with a not over polite inquiry as to her visitor's business; but Anne's appearance, very unlike anything she had expected to see, stayed her speech, and she only stared aggressively.

"Does Captain Lambert live here?" asked Anne.

"Yes, he do," answered Mrs. Smith, sharply. "And what

may you want of 'im, may I ask?"

"I am his cousin," Anne began.

"Oh, indeed!" interpolated Mrs. Smith, apparently for the sake of saying something unpleasant.

"I heard he was ill," Anne went on.

"Ill enough," said Mrs. Smith, speaking volubly now, and raising her voice as if to impress her words on some unseen listener: "But that ain't no reason why I shouldn't be paid my rent as is owing for six weeks or more. Hill or not hill, they'll 'ave to pack before the week's out as sure as my name's Jane Smith! Not that I've anything to say against the Captin. 'E's a pleasant spoken gentleman, 'e is; but I'm not a-goin' to stand any sauce from 'er, Mrs. Lambert or no Mrs. Lambert, and so I tell 'er."

"Your rent shall be paid," said Anne, in her serious, full-toned

voice. "Take this card in to Captain Lambert, and say his cousin is here."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure," said Mrs. Smith, in a very different tone; "any one can see as the Captain is a real gentleman. If I'd knowed you was his cousin——"

"Please go directly," interrupted Miss Escote; and the woman went.

From the small room opening off the passage, so close to the front door that Anne could catch a glimpse of its mean and sordid interior, came the sound of Mrs. Smith's words, and then a man's voice, thin and weak, saying, "Ask her to come in here." And Anne entered, and looked once again upon the man who had made her youth desolate and taken away the glory of her prime.

By the small fire he sat in a shabby easy-chair — old before his time, a gray-haired, bowed figure; his face lined and blurred

by dissipation and vice; his thin hands nerveless and powerless; clothed—he, the dandy of old!—in a worn dressing-gown which but ill kept out the cold, foggy air. Only his eyes—the beautiful blue eyes of Anne’s remembrance—kept something of their old color and expression, and it was not until he raised them half-shamedly to his cousin’s face that she recognized in him any least likeness to the gay and gallant soldier who had walked with her under the trees in Eden.

She went toward him with both hands outstretched.

“Dick!” she said.

No other greeting would come; and, since there is but little to record to the credit of Captain Richard Lambert, let it be remembered to his account that he found nothing to say in reply, but that two large tears rose in the blue eyes and fell down the worn cheeks while he held the hands of the woman he had wronged so deeply, and felt down

in what remained of his conscience that he was a sorry scoundrel, unworthy of a good woman's faithful memory.

A slight movement behind her made Anne turn, and, leaning against the smoke-darkened chimney-piece, stood a tall girl gazing at the visitor with immense dark eyes, which seemed to burn with an inner fire of their own, from out one of the most beautiful faces that Miss Escote had ever seen. The skin was of clear olive paleness; the nose straight and fine; the beautiful mouth curved into a perfect outline; while the shining eyes were fringed and overhung with blackest lashes and brows, and the wealth of raven hair broke all the restraints of that day of smooth-combed locks, and waved over the low forehead in enchanting little twirls and tendrils. Tall and finely-made, notwithstanding her shabby gown, the girl kept the air of neatness and grace acquired by the "young lady"

of the modern shop, although the dark fiery face told a tale of inherited Spanish, or perhaps gypsy, blood, very much out of keeping with such a destiny.

It was a strong and good face, too, in spite of a certain expression of half-jealous defiance now visible on it. Not personal jealousy of the cousin, an old woman in her young eyes, of whose youth's history she knew nothing, and whose possible rivalry with regard to her gentleman husband she was not likely to fear, but a kind of uneasy jealousy of her as a lady, one of his own class and so out of her own sphere (not that she consciously used so fine a word), mingled possibly with a proud defiance of Mrs. Smith's intentionally loud-spoken allusion to her "sauce."

She was proud of her husband, even loved him after a fashion, partly because of this same gentlemanhood—save the mark!—and his difference from the

other lodgers in the mean abode whither drink and debt had led him, and in a garret of which she spent the time not devoted to her daily work behind the counter of a neighboring haberdasher's. Partly, too, because on some occasion, when the offensive gallantry of another lodger had roused her proud spirit to fury, some ancient remnant of regard for women's delicacy had moved Captain Lambert to champion the girl against her admirer, and so to win the gratitude that is so near to love in her sex.

She had known no education in the true sense of that much-abused term. Except for the acquired quickness at accounts necessary for her calling, and knowledge enough to read and write passably, her mind was fallow so far as learning went; and although she had acquired, too, the habit of speaking with a certain air of refinement and grammatical precision, in moments of excitement and natural

speech she was wont to relapse into a stronger and more expressive vernacular, and even to show a tendency to trip over that perennial stumbling-block, the letter "H," which argued a painfully-mastered use of it.

As Miss Escote turned toward her and caught her burning glance, Captain Lambert said :

"Come here, Nell, and speak to my cousin, Miss Escote."

Anne held out her hand and took the girl's reluctant fingers.

"My dear," she said, in her kind, true voice, "I am glad to know you ; I hope we may be friends."

Nell's great eyes looked searchingly into her face, and then she said, without any fierceness :

"Thank you, Miss Escote, I'm sure."

Mrs. Smith received her rent that night, and notice that the visitor would return on the morrow and remove her lodgers to larger and more airy rooms—not far off ; for Captain Lam-

bert's days were numbered, and anything but the shortest journey was impossible to him until he should start on the longest one of all.

After all was settled, and Miss Escote was parting with Nell in the dirty little passage, Nell told her how her husband had fallen on the frozen pavement some weeks ago, and how "he had been hurt in his inside, and the doctor had said he'd never get over it," and how she thought, though she had never "let on" to him, that "he'd had a drop too much, poor fellow!"

She said it all quite simply, seeing that it was matter quite beyond discussion that he had been "a bit wild," and with no intention of wounding the kind heart that was feeling keenly the terrible inevitableness of this ending of her sometime lover's weak and wicked life. Anne's eyes, looking away into the long-gone years and their vanished Eden, fell unconsciously on the girl's

hand. The dark face flushed hotly.

"Oh, we're *married* fast enough," she said; "I'm not that sort."

Miss Escote's fair skin showed as hot a flush of shame.

"I never imagined"—she stammered, "I beg your pardon—what can have made you think I did——"

"You were looking at me so oddly," the girl began, and then smiled a smile which glorified her beautiful face. "He said you were good," she said, "and so you are!"

Miss Escote bent and kissed her.

"We shall be friends, I see, my dear," she said, "and poor Dick shall die in peace."

And so he did. Tended by loving hands of wife and old sweetheart; away from the mean surroundings of the squalid lodging-house, and in ease and comfort; penitent, let us hope—so far as such a nature is capable of peni-

tence—in some small measure for his ill-spent life, and with perfect trust in his cousin's promise that the young wife who had somehow won the last flickering affections of his light and worn-out heart, and her unborn child, should find a home with her when he was gone, the fascinating Dick Lambert drifted peaceably away from a world that had forgotten him and the two women who had loved him.

One day, a little before the end, while his wife rested in another room, and Anne sat working by his bedside as he lay awake but silent, she felt his eyes so persistently upon her, that at last she raised her own to find him gazing at her with an expression of such intense and sad appeal that she answered it as if he had spoken.

“Dick!” she said, gently, “I forgave everything long ago.”

A feeble sob shook his weak frame.

“Nancy,” he whispered hoarsely,

"I was a scoundrel—I am unworthy—and you are an angel." He paused, with his hollow eyes still upon her face. Then:

"Nancy—will you kiss me once before I die—and say again you forgive me?"

"I forgive you from my deepest soul, Dick;" and, bending over him, she laid her lips to the dying sinner's haggard cheek.

When, after laying Richard Lambert in his grave, Miss Escote returned to her own home, there went with her a dark, mournful-eyed young widow, whose rebellious waves of hair refused to keep in decent hiding under her cap, and toward whom the prim Hannah manifested a virtuous but condescending and kindly disapproval.

The yellow stars of the leafless jasmine were making the cottages gay when Miss Escote and her charge arrived at High Trees, and Anne's heart, sad with the

memory of the wasted life, and tender with the thought of the death-bed of her cousin, was immensely cheered and comforted by the sight of the dear and accustomed things of home. The peace and order of her house—the growing beauty of the spring in her garden and meadows—relieved the strain of feeling of the last few weeks, and here, away from the dull surroundings of his inglorious end, she could think of the dead man with nothing but tender grief, and hope that the other life might retrieve the failures and sins of the one he had spent so ill, and that hereafter she might perchance see him what she had believed him in their youth.

Meanwhile the poor young widow took up the greater part of her time and care.

Not that Nell was a weak or poor-spirited woman who spent her days in vain lamentations over her dead husband. She grieved for him, it is true; and

although she spoke quite openly and unreservedly to Miss Escote of him and his failings, it was always with affection and regret. To Anne herself she showed a passion of love—for she was a passionate creature at heart,—not belying her dark eyes and southern aspect. Everything Miss Escote did was right in her eyes; the gentlest hint from her as to grammar or social behavior she treasured up and acted on to her very best ability, and in these and other matters she showed an adaptability and a strength of mind and brain which proved her to be a woman of a very original and uncommon kind. Education, as I have said, she had none; but since Anne loved books, Nell read too, and many a time the shrewd comments she made with an utterly unbiased criticism, struck Anne with admiration for her undeveloped powers. Morally, she had a strong, straightforward code of conduct; what she thought wrong

nothing could induce her to do. From training and association, her code of morals would probably have seemed deficient to more delicately nurtured women, who cling to many things that appeared of no importance to her. But such as her code was, she never swerved from it, which is more than can be said of every one.

Miss Escote grew to love her dearly, and to feel that her promise to her cousin to guard the girl he had married was likely to prove the beginning of a great interest and happiness in her lonely life; and when the two women talked their woman's talk of the expected baby, for whose coming their deft fingers had sewn the dainty robes, and shirts, and shawl, and what not, and dressed the airy cradle—not unassisted and sniffed at by the virtuous Hannah, whose jealousy of the dark-eyed stranger had given way before her consideration and gentleness toward her;

dear cousin Anne's trusted maid—many were their plans for the future, and their joint care and guardianship of the longed-for darling.

Alas! all human plans and projects come to nought.

One glorious summer day, when the world was full of beauty and fragrance, and the bees were humming over the roses, and time seemed to stand still, and death to be impossible, Nell Lambert's dark eyes closed on all that brightness—on the little dark-haired baby-daughter so lovingly looked for—on Anne's kind face and the steadfast truth of it as she promised to be father and mother both to the orphan—on the life that seemed to be just opening out to her its real scope and significance.

When the sweet summer evening fell, and the baby's feeble wail seemed to awaken echoes in the old house that had slept since the last of Anne's weakly little sisters had found it not worth while to

stay longer in so unsatisfactory a world, the beautiful young mother lay, like a glorious marble effigy, at rest forever; roses on her cold breast, roses scattered everywhere around her—the sweet old garden roses the town-bred girl had loved and reveled in—once saying, half playfully, half seriously, she would like to be “smothered in them” when she should lie in her coffin.





III.

A CONFIDENCE.

*“ For in companions
That do converse and waste the time together,
Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of love,
There must be needs a like proportion
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit.”*

—MERCHANT OF VENICE.



N C E more it was summer in the old garden at High Trees. Roses, as many and as sweet as had decked the last resting-place of dark-eyed Nell Lambert, were sunning their beauty, and making the warm air fragrant with the lavish generosity of the most beautiful and sweet of flowers in her prime. The sun lay hot upon the unsheltered parts of the

garden, shining on that July afternoon from one of those cloudless summer skies which are wont, as evening falls, to put on a magic and lucent depth of clearness that lends a mystic charm to the first twinkle of the stars as "heaven's pale candles" peep out one by one. When, in the midst of that tender brightness the sun's sinking leaves behind on such a day, the evening star hangs like a lamp, the dullest spirit catches a hint of eternity, and knows itself immortal.

On this particular afternoon, in the shade of the fir-trees, whose fragrance held its own, and was an added delight even among the roses, sat two girls, too deep in talk to heed the gallant peacock, who, accustomed to be fed by them, trailed his glorious train before their eyes, and shot forth his prismatic neck and crested head in vain, clucking the while expectantly. Presently, as if in despite, he departed, and going to a bed of carnations

nearer the house, began deliberately and skillfully to nip off the unopened buds. At this, one of the girls arose—she had been sitting on a low garden-chair, while her companion reposed on the grass, her head against her friend's knee.

“Oh! Cousin Nancy's beloved carnations!” cried the girl who had risen, and with a swift rush she pursued the regal bird, who bustled off more hurriedly than befitted his race, and took himself out of sight.

The girl came back to her companion, and reseating herself, plunged again into her talk—girlish talk, mingled of question and answer, light laughter, merry exclamations, and the thousand follies of youth and inexperience.

Twenty-one years had gone by since Nell Lambert had been laid among the dead Escotes in the old churchyard—so near the home that had sheltered her last days, that she had been borne to it up the climbing path that

mounted to the church from the village by her cousin's servants, as they had borne their master, and as Anne intended they should bear her.

Twenty-one years ago Nell's dark eyes had closed upon the face of the little daughter who to-day stood—her living image—among the roses.

At twenty-one years old Eleanor Anne Lambert was a well-nigh perfect specimen of girlhood. Tall, straight, and strong in her rounded slenderness, with all the dark and glowing beauty of her mother, twenty-one years of plenty and peace, and refinement of surroundings, had but added a finer charm to the beautiful womanhood she had inherited from the brave-natured shop-girl with her many potential qualities.

Twenty-one years of association with Anne Escote's rare nature, of education of mind and heart and soul, under the care and through the experience of

that noble spirit, had made the girl strong against the assaults of the weaker strain she derived from her father.

Miss Escote's neighbors had shaken their heads over her theories of the orphan's education—her discarding of rules and methods, and her strong belief, inherited from her father—that education meant the bringing out of the powers and the development of the whole mind rather than the learning of a multiplicity of things. The wise matrons had smiled the tolerant smile of matronhood over the incomprehensible theories of the childless spinster, while ladies in the same unmarried condition as herself had uttered the oft-repeated formula, "If *I* had had the bringing up of that child!"—a formula so common that its repetition tempts one to suppose that the only *really* well brought-up children are those that never existed.

But in whatever way the re-

sult may have been brought about—whether by the success of Anne Escote's theories or in spite of them—there were few found to deny that the result was very beautiful and charming; or that, if Eleanor Lambert were less frivolous—fonder of “reading and all that,” as the young people round Allersley said—than many girls, at least she was not made at all “stuck up,” or conceited thereby, but was gentle in word and deed, whatever latent fires burned in her dark eyes.

She was not accomplished in the usual sense of the word. Like her father, she had a fine natural taste, cultivated by education and the run of old Mr. Escote's fine library. Moreover, she had her mother's unreasoning and instinctive love for all beautiful things, added to the rarer love for Nature in all her moods. Anne, whose long walks with her father were among the most cherished memories of

their days of companionship, hailed this instinct in her small ward with delight, and many were the happy hours the elderly woman and the bright-eyed child spent in the lanes and fields—hours of healthful exercise and enjoyment wherein they stored up interests for years. But as to real accomplishments she had but few. She had learned to draw, and had a certain natural facility, but felt no power of real attainment. She had learned to play, and could pass many a happy half-hour softly fingering the keys for her own amusement; but she had no power of brilliant execution, and her great love and need for music found satisfaction in Miss Escote's, which was very far above the average.

“Cousin Nancy”—so Anne has taught the child to call her—and echoes from the past when Dick Lambert had been the only one to use it, gave an added sweetness to the name on the

baby lips—"Cousin Nancy, pay me a *pitty* tune!" had been little Eleanor's cry often and often in her childhood, and Cousin Nancy never refused.

Between the woman and the child there was a perfect love and trust, that did but deepen as the years went by, and Anne drew nearer to old age as the child blossomed into beautiful girlhood and more beautiful womanhood. Eleanor threw into her love for the woman who had been father, and mother, and friend in one, who had tended, and taught, and loved her from the day of her birth, all the ardor poor Nell had felt for her husband's cousin; while Anne's for her had the force of all that which her lavish heart could have bestowed on husband and children of her own, if Dick—had not been Dick! And this was Dick's child. To such a nature as Anne Escote's that fact was the very essence of her love for the orphan—would have

been even though the child's mother had not been as dear to her as Nell became. For under Anne's grave reasonableness—her power of seeing the many-sidedness of life—her quiet ways—there lay an immense capacity for sentiment, a constant tenderness of heart that perhaps none but her father and Eleanor ever fully appreciated. As to the girl, there was an answering note in herself which vibrated in response to the elder woman's touch at all times; for at the bottom of *her* heart, too, under all the joy and strength of her youth, there lay the same yearning for the deeper things of life—the mysterious, the incomprehensible; the same indefinite longing for some good too great and vague for words, that had made and kept Anne Escote's heart both young and sad.

On the July afternoon when the girls talked under the fir-trees, Miss Escote sat, as she had sat on that wintry morning

which had given to her later life its greatest interest, in her cheerful room up-stairs. A book was by her side, her knitting in her hand, and on her peaceful face the beauty of a noble old age, the history of a well-spent life writ plain to see. From time to time, as the echoes of a girlish laugh floated in through the open window on the warm-scented air of the garden, a quiet smile touched her features like a ray of winter sunshine, and once she rose and looked out as if with a desire to rest her eyes on her darling's visible presence.

It was at the moment when Eleanor made her swift rush at the peacock, and Miss Escote's smile grew brighter at the sight, and she watched the girl until she had returned to her seat, and once more taken her friend's head against her knee.

"God bless her!" murmured the old woman, softly, and then with a sigh: "God bless her,

and let me live to see her a few years older!"

Eleanor Lambert had returned the day before from a month's visit to London, and it was to hear her news, and in return give an account of her own doings during a visit of the same duration to relations in Scotland, that Felicia Gray, the constant friend of her childhood and girlhood, had come to spend a long afternoon of mutual confidences.

Dr. Gray, Felicia's father, may be said to have been, with the exception of Anne Escote, Eleanor Lambert's earliest friend, since he was present at her birth, and had piloted her through the dangers of her childish sicknesses. His task had not been a hard one, for Eleanor's health was as perfect as her constitution, and the doctor was accustomed to point to her as an example of what every healthily brought-up child should be.

Dr. Gray, like many another of his profession, had qualities

which enabled the elderly woman, thus suddenly called upon to act the part of both parents to the little orphan, to trust in him as her most valued friend and counsellor; and on his side not only did he give an unfailing care and affection to both guardian and ward, but in all Miss Escote's theories of education and development he was her staunchest ally and backer.

As to Eleanor, Dr. Gray was so much part of her life that she loved him with the instinctive love that is generally associated with ties of blood, and she could not remember the time when he had not seemed to her the best and noblest man in the world, while Felicia had been her chosen friend from the time when Mrs. Gray, a despondent, grumbling woman, and one of the most severe critics of Miss Escote's "foolish, old-maidish theories," used to lament over the way "that dreadful child" led her own pretty, sedate little daughter

into wild escapades, until the present time, when even Mrs. Gray felt the influence of her beauty and ardent gentleness, and Felicia had grown into a slim maiden, whose sweet pink cheeks and demure blue eyes were the outward graces of a steadfast heart, loving and true if less ardent than her friend's; while the silky chestnut hair covered a head that held a very clear and bright little brain;—to some purpose, for Felicia was the eldest of poor peevish Mrs. Gray's large family of four sons and four daughters, and the burden of the woman's part of the domestic life at Westfields fell upon her soft shoulders.

No wonder this maiden of one-and-twenty had at times a grave air and a look of anxious responsibility unsuited to her years and her soft young prettiness.

From her earliest girlhood it had been she who saved "poor mamma" from the fatigue that lady deprecated as feeling so

unfit for, as well as from every other annoyance the child could prevent.

"Come out into the spinney, and I will swing you; poor mamma has got a headache," she would say to the scrambling brood of children, coming one after the other so close that they trod upon each other's heels, while she herself, but for her accepted motherhood, was but a child. And the flock would tear out to the swing, hung between two tall trees in the spinney, and after the elders had tumbled in and out often enough, Felicia's young arms would work for the entertainment of Susie, and Bob, and Baby, to cries of "Oh, Felicia! it's *my* turn now!" "Oh, Felicia! Susie's been in all the time!" until they ached.

As years went on, Mrs. Gray left more and more on the willing hands of her eldest daughter. It was she to whom the hard-working father turned for sympathy

and interest ; by a tacit consent his wife's shortcomings in that respect were never alluded to between him and Felicia.

"Poor mamma's head aches," poor mamma's ill-health and general disabilities in the matter of troublesome duties, were held sufficient excuse for everything, and Felicia cheerfully discussed with her father not only ways and means, and if he might honestly allow himself another horse, and so forth, but how best to dispose of wild but warm-hearted Tom, and to put a stronger spirit into nervous Hugh, not to speak of the little girls' schooling and the wear and tear of frocks and shoes and jackets and trousers.

Much happiness came to the over-worked little daughter through her comradeship with the strong and tender-hearted father ; but at times life was a little hard for her, and her well-earned visit to Scotland, on which her father had insisted in the face

of profuse lamentations and wonderings as to what she should do without her on Mrs. Gray's part, had been almost the first real holiday she had had since her childhood. Her friendship with Eleanor, and the welcome always ready for her coming at High Trees had been the chief joys of her life, and in despite of all the well-worn jibes at the frailty of women's friendships, their small jealousies, and petty quarrels, the two girls had not only a strong and constant mutual love, but an equally sincere mutual admiration. Eleanor's dark beauty, her grace, her depths of feeling, the way she wore her clothes, even, were as much a source of admiration to the doctor's pretty daughter as were her own blue eyes and wild-rose tints, her clear sense, and her thousand virtues as daughter and sister to Eleanor.

They were not alike in much, save the sweet fragrance of youth and goodness.

The clear light of Felicia's life burned steady and serene, like a lamp brightening and illuminating the household circle—the round of duty—smoothing away obstacles and making dark things plain.

Eleanor's spirit took a wider range. Her light fell softly, like the moon's, over all the landscape, even to the dim distances where only shadows are. Her fancy lived in space, and was at home among the stars, and when it visited the lower earth brought back immortal longings with it.

Who shall say which light brought most of blessing?

If the moonlight is good to love, to dream, to break one's heart under, the men rest from their labors, the women sew, the children dance by the light of the household lamp, and when it goes out the room is too dark for work or play, though the moon be shining at its full.

However it may be, the two girls loved one another with a

love that was destined to be put to proof—and conquer.

“Nell, dear,” Felicia was saying, “was Mrs. Graham as funny as ever?”

Mrs. Graham, an old friend of Anne Escote’s, had been Eleanor’s hostess during her visit to London.

“Funny! I don’t know that *funny* is exactly the word. She’s just one of those people that are amusing to talk about; but—well, it’s a shame to say so when she is always so kind to me and so anxious to have me—but—” she paused.

“But not amusing to be with?” asked Felicia.

“No; it is horrid to say so; but somehow, though I should laugh quite good-naturedly if some one were describing her to me—supposing I did not know her—when I am with her I can’t help feeling irritated with all her countless ailments and her elaborate descriptions of them and their remedies. She was

going in for steel this time, and took such doses of it that really at last I began to expect to see her come out in a rash of needles!"

Felicia laughed, then sighed. Fancied ailments had been such common events in her experience of her mother that she passed them by as inevitable. Eleanor's quick sympathy caught the meaning of the little sigh.

"It's horrible of people in 'rude health' like me," she said, gently, "to laugh at those who are not so strong. Of course, they naturally grow a little fanciful. Do you remember Mrs. Roper saying to Cousin Nancy what a pleasure it must be to have me with her to cheer her with my 'animal spirits?' As if I spent the day in jumping over the chairs and tables—when I was quite eighteen, too!"

"Yes, I think your health was rather too 'rude,' as you call it, to please her. She thought it a little unladylike to be so well."

“Mrs. Graham has given up art this year,” Eleanor went on, with a smile. “I am a little sorry, because she hurried me through the picture galleries dreadfully. She says science is the only subject worthy the attention of an intelligent being, and we went to a great many lectures by people—both men and women—all in spectacles, and looking as if they had mislaid their combs and clothes-brushes.”

“Why, I thought you and Miss Escote went in for science yourselves!” exclaimed Felicia, speaking of that vast subject as if it had been lawn-tennis.

Eleanor laughed.

“My mighty mind likes it in small doses, I suppose,” she said; “Cousin Nancy’s science-powders in jam. Besides, the lectures really were interesting enough, only I wanted to be at theaters or concerts instead, and unfortunately those are below the notice of an intelligent being—anyhow of Mrs. Graham—just

at present. Never mind, they will have another turn some day—next year, perhaps, when I am with her. But she *is* so good and kind to me!” cried the girl; “it’s a shame to laugh at her ever so little. I am sure she would do anything in the world to serve Cousin Nancy or me. She always talks as if we had been girls together!”

Both girls laughed, and then there was a little pause.

“Nell,” said Felicia presently, “did you meet any one in town? I am sure lots of people must have admired you——”

“Hundreds—thousands, if it pleases you,” laughed Nell.

“No; but, Nell—didn’t *any one* fall in love with you?”

“Not that I know of,” answered her friend; “not enough to tell me so, anyhow. You know Mrs. Graham has not a very large circle of friends, and now that she has taken up science the livelier ones have dropped off a good deal. One old gentle-

man—with spectacles, of course—who prides himself on always using words of one syllable except under great pressure, used to come pretty often. Mrs. Graham thinks him very interesting; she says he is so Anglo-Saxon. I suppose I can't be, for it came to be a thrilling excitement to me to try to inveigle him into sentences where monosyllables were out of the question."

"Didn't he get to hate you?" asked Felicia.

Eleanor's dark eyes lighted up with mirth.

"Well, no, I don't think he did. At least—you don't know his name even, so there's no harm in telling you—one day he wrote me a beautiful little letter, asking me to be Mrs. So-and-so, and, except our two names, I really believe there wasn't a single word of more than one syllable in it."

"Have you kept it? Oh, do show it to me!"

Eleanor shook her head.

"Some day, perhaps," she said. "Somehow I could not take it seriously—it seemed too much like a composition written by a child for a prize. I am afraid my answer must have read very tamely after it. I only hope his pride in his own performance more than compensated for any small mortification my refusal cost him. I half thought at first of trying to emulate his letter and write mine too in monosyllables; I thought he might perhaps take it as a compliment; but I abandoned the idea, for on mature deliberation I feared, on the other hand, he *might* take it as an impertinence."

"He couldn't have done that if he knew anything about you," protested Felicia, stoutly. "I wonder *he* had the impertinence to dare to propose to you!"

"Oh, no! it wasn't impertinence; and he really was a nice, kindly old gentleman. I dare say he thought I should prove an

apt pupil, and we might institute a school of pure Anglo-Saxon monosyllabists. I wonder he didn't ask Mrs. Graham instead. Perhaps he thought her too old to begin learning her own language afresh, especially as she has a natural love for words of the longest and most elaborate kind."

There was another pause, and the magnetism that affects all sensitive natures made Eleanor aware that Felicia had something special to say that would not come readily to her lips.

"I have been doing all the talking," she exclaimed at last; "tell me some more about yourself, dear. Your letters while you were in Scotland were so short—except that you were enjoying yourself (how I used to envy you sometimes among the mountains!) they told me very little."

"Nell!" said Felicia, softly.

"Yes? Go on, dear; I do so want to hear all about it."

"There was some one there—at my uncle's—a sort of cousin of my aunt's—I don't know how to tell you; it may be nothing—sometimes I don't dare to think——"

Eleanor put her arm round her friend's neck, as Felicia laid her burning cheek in her lap and hid her eyes.

"Did the—some one—fall in love with you, dear?" she asked, tenderly.

Felicia took her hand and softly pressed it against her hot cheek.

"I think so—I—I—*hope* so," she whispered, tremulously.

"Tell me all about it," said Eleanor.

"He was staying there," began Felicia; "I did not like to write it to you—there was so little to say; but we—liked each other directly, and he said my singing was like a bird's ('so it is,' put in Eleanor), and he went for walks and drives with us, and he always tried to be with me—and

oh, Nell ! he is so dear and nice—not really handsome, I suppose—but *better* than handsome. And the last day, when we were in the garden, he asked me to gather him a rose, and he told me he knew some people near here, the Blakes of Keston, and they had asked him to stay there this summer. He said he had not made up his mind if he should accept the invitation, but that now it depended entirely on me—if I said he might come he would write that day and accept——” She stopped, out of breath.

“And you said he might?” asked Eleanor, caressing the chestnut head with her hand.

Felicia’s voice failed her as she whispered, “Yes ;” and then in accents of intense feeling, which Eleanor had never yet heard from her lips, she went on passionately, “Oh, Nell, dear ! it *must* mean he loves me, mustn’t it ? It can’t have been all a mistake ? I *know* it isn’t ! I *know* he would

have asked me while I was there, only that we were hardly ever alone together. Nell, dear! say you think it is really true! If it is not, I can't bear it—my heart will break!”

“Don't cry, my dear darling, don't cry!” said Eleanor in her tenderest tones. “It is true; I feel sure—certain—it is true. He will come, and it will be all right. He is a lucky man! I hope he knows it,” she went on more lightly, to help the girl to recover from her excitement. “Don't be unhappy about it, dear. I am so glad you have told me.”

“I couldn't write it,” said Felicia, tremulously; “there was nothing really to tell.”

“Of course not. But now, is he coming soon? Did he leave Scotland before you?”

“Yes, a fortnight; I think he was to be at Keston this week.”

“This week!” cried Eleanor instantly, full of excited interest. Oh! I wish I knew when!

Felicia, promise to let me know the minute—the very minute—it is settled! If you let a soul—except your father—know before me, I shall never forgive you!”

Felicia's smile had come back, a little tearful, but happy.

“I should think so!—if——” she said.

“I declare you have never told me his name yet!” cried Eleanor. “Is it very ugly?”

Felicia turned her head away shyly.

“His name is Will Egerton,” she said, softly, lingering lovingly over the syllables.

There was an instant's pause before Eleanor's answer came. As her friend spoke the precious name, she had given an almost imperceptible start, and into her face there had come that suddenly-arrested expression which tells of a not wholly pleasant surprise.

Felicia's eyes were on the grass at which her slim fingers were nervously plucking, or in

the dark ones above her she might have seen a sudden dilation, and on her friend's cheek a slight access of color.

But whatever the emotion the announcement of Felicia's lover's name aroused, the girl had mastered it in a moment. Before the other had had time to wonder at the short pause, Eleanor was speaking in her usual tone, or one so nearly like it, that Felicia's ears, filled with the echoes that sacred name had awakened in her maidenly heart, detected no difference.

"Will Egerton!" she said, gaily. "Well, Felicia, darling, this *is* a coincidence! Do you know I must have already met your Mr. Will Egerton."

"Oh, Nell, dear! *where*—how—where *did* you meet him?"

"In the train yesterday," she answered. "Of course, he must have been on his way to the Blakes'; he got out at the Junction."

"Tell me all about him,

Nell!" implored Felicia; "tell me what you thought of him. Isn't he good-looking? But how do you know it *was* Will—Mr. Egerton? Did you see it on his luggage—or what? Oh, fancy your coming across him like that!"

Eleanor laughed.

"Well, I must confess to having tried very hard to get a peep at the initials on his portmanteau," she said; "but I didn't discover his name from them—he told me. You see we had been having a little conversation before that. There were two old ladies in the carriage with us when we started from London, and they were so afraid of draughts, and accidents, and concealed murderers, and all sorts of horrors, that they talked to us both—I mean Mr. Egerton and me—all the first part of the journey about them, and how glad they were to find a carriage with respectable young people in it——" She paused and smiled.

“Yes, yes; go on, Nell, go on!”

“Well, naturally we—we two respectable young people—looked at each other with a smile at that. And then—well, it was natural, too, that when the two poor old ladies, who felt so safe under our protection, got out at Rugby—and I needn’t tell you that your—that Mr. Egerton got out, too, and helped them with their numberless packages with chivalrous politeness—well, naturally we laughed a little when he got in again. Of course, I couldn’t refuse to talk to him after our common experience, and he was very pleasant and amusing.”

“Oh, Nell, dear! how delightful! I *am* so glad you have seen him. Don’t you think he is handsome—or anyhow good-looking? Of course, he is very dark, and people always like their opposites; so I daresay he would not strike you as much as he did me.”

"I think he has—a *beautiful* face," said Eleanor, very seriously, and bent her dark head and kissed her friend. "Felicia, dear, I congratulate you."

Felicia's lip quivered, and the tears dimmed her blue eyes.

"It is too good to be true!" she whispered, tremulously, "I am afraid. I am ashamed of having told you, even you, Nell."

"Don't be ashamed, dear. Telling me is only telling yourself, you know. What is there to be ashamed of in—liking—a man like that?"

Felicia rubbed her cheek against her friend's hand as she held it between both hers.

"He didn't tell you it was to the Blakes' he was going?" she asked.

"He said he was on his way to visit friends near the Junction," answered Eleanor.

She did not mention that the young man had appended to that harmless remark a few words—spoken with an expression in his

dark eyes that added much to their weight—to the effect that the hope of seeing his fellow-traveler again would considerably enhance the pleasure of his visit to Keston. And looking back into those dark eyes which almost matched her own, Eleanor Lambert would have been less than woman if she had not felt a sympathetic thrill in answer to his words.

She had not returned his playful, “Will Egerton, at your service,” induced by his discovery of her abortive attempt to decipher his name on his luggage, by a corresponding revelation—which he may perhaps have hoped for, though too true a gentleman to try to surprise it—but she had let him carry on the conversation instituted by the timid ladies (how Will blessed them and their fears!) and speeded by the laugh of healthful young spirits which had followed their exit, and they had talked for the last half-hour of

their journey together of the country, the last new novel or play, or what not, to find a dozen points of agreement or of difference—what did it matter which? For were not both young and fresh and ardent, and what better converse could a young man want than with this noble, modest maiden, whose serious soul looked out from the most beautiful eyes in the world, and whose true woman's instinct told her she need fear naught but honor and respect from this chance companion with the glory of his youthful manhood upon him?

So when Will Egerton, hat in hand as they parted at the Junction, had made his little speech, Eleanor's brave eyes had looked back into his, and she had answered in that low-toned, tender voice of hers, that seemed attuned to all the deeper feelings of the soul, "Yes, I hope we may meet again."

And through the hours that

had passed since her home-coming—even while receiving and returning with caressing love Cousin Nancy's beloved welcome, Hannah's primly affectionate greeting, and the general delight at her longed-for return—a sense of something, indefinite and indescribable, a quickened pulse of the heart, a sweet, strange presentiment of she knew not what, had been with her. As she lay in her white bed, watching with dreamy eyes the full moon sloping “her westering wheel” across her window, thoughts new and sweet rose and fell like music in her mind, and it was not until the short summer night was past and the dawn had quenched the stars that her eyes softly closed.

“Will Egerton, at your service,” was her last waking thought, and she smiled even in her sleep.

And Will Egerton was the hero of Felicia's maiden love-story, and it was to woo and win Felicia he had made that journey!

A servant approached the two girls.

"Mrs. Lee is in the drawing-room, Miss Eleanor," she said, "and the mistress says will you and Miss Gray come in to tea."

"Come along, Felicia dear," said Eleanor, and none could have guessed from her tone that an airy something, which for the last twenty-four hours had haunted her sleeping and waking thoughts, had within the last few moments crumbled into the "baseless fabric of a vision."





IV.

FATE'S SPINNING.

*"This shall return no more,
Summer shall paint the floor
Of earth with flowers o'er ;
This shall not come to me."*

—CAROLINE FITZGERALD.

FIFTEEN days had passed since the summer's afternoon when Felicia had told her tremulous tale of dawning love and timid hope in the garden at High Trees, and on another afternoon that might have been the same in its glory of sun and sky, Eleanor sat alone in her old place under the fir-trees. Alone for the moment, although seats placed in every shady spot, and white-draped

tables bearing dainty cakes and cooling drinks at intervals among the trees told of expected friends and the gentle pleasures of a country garden-party.

Eleanor, in her gown and large hat of creamy white, a fragrant bunch of roses at her belt, was a winsome sight, and if, as she sat alone, there had been for a moment a certain wistfulness in her beautiful eyes, as she rose and went to meet Cousin Nancy across the lawn—a picture of what reverend age should be, in her black dress, the soft folds of her white kerchief at her throat, and the worn outline of her noble face softened by the filmy lace of her cap—there was nothing in the girl's face but loving brightness.

“You bad woman!” she cried, “how often have I commanded you not to come out in the blazing sun without a parasol?”

“I beg your pardon, my dear,” answered Miss Escote, with a

laugh and a look of loving pride at the fair young figure before her. "I really did not do it on purpose this time; but I am too old to alter my habits now, and you know it is a little late to begin considering my complexion."

"Your complexion is prettier than many a young girl's still," said Eleanor, with a caressing touch on the elder woman's cheek, which, in fact, still bore the soft hue that matched the undying youthfulness of her heart.

"It's Felicia that will bear away the palm for complexion to-day," said Miss Escote; "how happy the demure little puss is in her engagement! It does one good to see such happiness, and the child deserves all the good things in the world."

"Yes," said Eleanor, in her serious way, "she *does*."

For Felicia's shy hopes had been fulfilled, and she and Will Egerton were engaged.

If the intrusive vision of a creamy oval face, the deep, dark luster of a pair of love-compelling eyes, the low tones of a serious, tender voice, had risen unbidden at moments between Will Eger-ton and the memory of the gentle blue-eyed maiden with whom he had walked and talked in Scotland but so short a time before, whose shy approval had been so sweet, and whose bird-like singing had cast a spell over him, he put it from him loyally. For was not the rose Felicia had plucked for him in that northern garden in his pocket-book still? Had he not made the journey down to Elmshire for the sole purpose of seeing her and asking her a certain sweet question, and hearing an answer whose purport he could scarce doubt? Had he not rehearsed the scene a hundred times, and pictured the soft bloom that would overspread the sweet young face and the shy yet happy glance of the clear blue eyes? And was all this to be

forgotten forsooth because of the passing vision of another woman?

If, even in his deepest heart—in those depths we all try to ignore—Will had hidden a dream of disloyalty, the first sight of Felicia's face when they met destroyed that unacknowledged dream forever. They met in the company of others, and with no chance of private talk; but there was that in the girl's face that made Will say to himself that he would be the greatest scoundrel unhung if he proved disloyal to the implied troth his farewell words had given her. "No," he vowed solemnly to himself; "not one pain or disappointment, however slight, shall touch that sweetest heart through me."

And the vow brought back with it a rush of the old feeling in its first freshness, and he went to rest full of so tender a sense of his own good fortune in having won the love of the sweetest and

dearest maiden in the world, that it overran his heart with something that took love's guise.

"Eleanor Lambert!" he thought; "and she is her dearest friend!"—for Felicia had, of course, found opportunity to discuss with him the astonishing "coincidence" that it should have been *her* dear Nell who had been his fellow-traveler—"Well, it says a great deal for the taste—of both."

The next morning Mr. Egerton rode over to Westfields. The scene he had mentally rehearsed so many times took place, if not entirely after any one of the various versions he had pictured—since actual conversations are apt to vary considerably from imaginary ones, where the imaginer takes both parts—still with the foreseen result, and Will Egerton returned to receive his hosts' congratulations on his luck in winning one of the prettiest and best girls of the country-side; while the girl

herself, after enjoying a perfect ovation of rejoicing, mingled with mild laments from her mother, noisy regrets at the prospective loss of her never-failing kindness from the younger branches of the family, and a few words of deep and tender sympathy from her father, which filled her heart anew with a rush of enthusiastic love for him, went her way to High Trees to tell her tale to Nell with tears and smiles and blushes.

And Nell answered and smiled and petted her in return without one backward thought—with nothing in her heart but love and rejoicing for the friend of all her life.

She, too, had buried one little memory so deep in her heart that she prayed God it might never—*never*—look her in the face again.

There came a day when the thought that it had been so—that there had not been one touch of aught but loyal sym-

pathy in her heart that day—was well nigh the sole small thread of comfort she could cling to.

But up to this afternoon Eleanor and her friend's *fiancé* had not met. Westfields was a good mile from High Trees. Will's visits there had to be timed to suit the convenience of his friends, the Blakes; maybe the young man himself had lost his desire for a second meeting with his fellow-traveler. Anyhow, in response to Felicia's representations of her great wish to take him to her friend's home, he always found some excuse. He was so comfortable in the Westfields garden; it was so hot; he must soon be off again, and so on; and so it came to pass that the first formal introduction of Mr. William Egerton to Miss Escote and her ward took place at Miss Escote's garden-party.

Eleanor came forward to the little group from Westfields with a smile on her beautiful face,

and after greeting the others, held out her hand to Will.

"We are old acquaintances, Mr. Egerton," she said, brightly. "If only I had known on what errand you were come, I should have made even stronger efforts to discover your name!"

Yes; she felt no flutter at her heart as she spoke; she could look him straight in the eyes without the slightest thrill. Thank God! that silly, baseless vision had fled—fled utterly. Her cheek had burned with shame more than once that it should have arisen from nothing more than the chance companionship of a few hours.

Will made some light and suitable reply, and she stood talking with him and Felicia for a few minutes until other guests claimed her attention. Will's eyes followed her, and he seemed unaware that Felicia had spoken.

"Isn't she just lovely, Will?" the girl repeated.

Her lover's wandering eyes came back to her face.

"Perfect!" he said, succinctly.

Felicia laughed a laugh of perfect content.

"You'll make me jealous!" she said.

"Never, I hope," answered Will, more solemnly than her tone seemed to warrant.

She laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Come and see the dear old kitchen garden," she said, gayly; "I'm sure you'll say that's perfect."

Later in the afternoon, when some of the guests had left, and the remainder were enjoying the freshness of the early evening, strolling by twos and threes about the old garden, which had begun to exhale its twilight perfume, Will being in discourse with his hostess, the two girls had leisure for a little talk.

"He is coming to Dawlish with us," Felicia was saying, ("he," of course, meant Will).

"Oh, Nell, dear, won't it be heavenly?"

It had for many years been the custom of the Gray family to spend the month of September at the seaside, and a custom almost as invariable that Eleanor should stay anyhow the first fortnight of the time with them.

"But, Felicia," said she, 'don't you think this year, as you will have Mr. Egerton with you,' ("oh, call him Will!" interpolated Felicia, but Eleanor went on), "it will be more convenient to—your mother—not to have another visitor as well? You will have your own time taken up, you know, dear, and——"

"*Eleanor!*" cried Felicia, dismay on her face. "What are you thinking of? Why, you *know* we should all be horribly disappointed if you didn't come, too; it would be like breaking up all our old ways! And you know, dear, it may be the last time we shall all be together in the dear old way."

That appeal was not to be gainsaid. Eleanor slipped her arm round her friend's waist.

"The new way will be as happy—a great deal happier even, I hope," she said, lovingly.

And so, in the first days of September, to Dawlish the whole party went, Mrs. Gray irritable with the unusual exertion of the journey; her husband helpful and thoughtful for her comfort and his children's pleasure as of yore; Felicia not too much absorbed in her individual happiness to be, as always, the capable daughter, sister, and caterer for everybody's well-being, and Eleanor to all appearance the Eleanor they all, after their fashion, knew and loved.

The carriage-full of noisy, cheerful youngsters and their elders bore but faint resemblance to that in which the nervous old ladies had served as the indirect introduction to each other of two "respectable young people ;"

and it would perhaps be curious to inquire if anything in the long journey to Devonshire brought back to either of the two any memory of the earlier one and their first meeting.





V.

FATE'S WEAVING.

*"Alas, how easily things go wrong !
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long ;
And there follows a mist and a weeping
rain,
And life is never the same again."*

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

THE sun shone that September as if he, too, desired to make Felicia's last maiden seaside holiday memorable and delightful. Day after day he rose in a sky of unclouded blue, or still better, a sky piled at wide intervals with those far-off masses of snowy cloud which make the azure all the more heavenly clear.

Evening after evening the rich red cliffs glowed to his brilliance,

and before the glow was gone the moon and her attendant stars were keeping his place for him, and wooing the waves into tremulous paths and points of silver sheen.

All day long the young Grays bathed and boated, and fished and raced and ran as only healthy young folks can. Every morning began afresh their mother's plaintive lament over the noise they made and their not easily-appeased appetites; every morning came as regularly Dr. Gray's good-humored excuses for both and the general tearing of him in a dozen different directions as the various plans of the various members of his family suggested. Long walks over the moors; journeys to Teignmouth, Torquay, and Exeter; picnics at every available opportunity;—not a day but had its own delights. And still the sun blessed them, and the soft wind from the south kept the atmosphere fresh without bringing

the rain on its wings that would have brought gloom into the young faces.

And Felicia was in Paradise ; for was not Will the very gentlest and most thoughtful of lovers ? Ready, if she pleased, to wander away with her alone along the cliffs or over the moors ; as ready to join in the boating and racing and picnicking, and always unselfish and considerate. Why, he was an ideal lover, and the girl held her head high with pride as she walked by his side and felt him her very own.

And Eleanor ?

She, too, laughed and talked among the others ; she acted mermaid in the waves at morning with Felicia and her young sisters ; she walked for miles over the moors with the boys with her fine, free step ; she danced with her old lightness and spirit in the evenings, when, shore and moonlight at last forsaken, the effervescing spirits of the family were fain for yet another outlet,

And yet, and yet—something had come over the girl—something she would not stay to think over, something she dared not own to herself.

Why was it that, while the others were in the full swing of mirth and noise, she would so often slip away, and, resting on a fallen rock, gaze and gaze at the waste of waters with eyes full of a yearning other than that vague *Sehnsucht* which is the gift of the sea to all true sea-lovers? What drew her so often to her chamber window, where, when dance and song over and the house at rest, she would sit for an hour so quiet that she might have been a white-robed statue in the moonlight—to fall presently on her knees by her bedside with prayers to which tears were not strangers? Why, when Felicia, in the bird-like tones that had won Will Egerton's heart, sang a simple little song that told of lover's parting—that trite story that is as old as the world—did

Eleanor suddenly feel a swift rush of tears to her eyes, and at the same moment a consciousness that Will's were fixed strangely on her face? She had heard Felicia sing that song a dozen times before with no more than a gentle emotion. And why—*why*—did she always know instinctively when those dark eyes turned her way? And whence came the terrible—the sweet—no, the *wicked* consciousness that they fell on her with a look they never wore for any other—not even Felicia?

Why, too, since Will never spoke to her one word that the whole world might not hear, since his manner to her was not only chivalrous in its respect, but almost formal, was she aware that under the respect and deference ran a current that told of ardent forces as the gulf-stream warms the cold ocean-waves?

She dared not guess; it was hideous disloyalty to the friend of all her life to give any

name to her trouble even in her thoughts. No; with God's help it would pass away—Felicia should never know—they would be happy. This terrible visit to Dawlish would soon be over. At home with dear Cousin Nancy she would be able to tear away forever the magic web that had enwound her; she would forget—him. And her pale face, crimsoned with shame at that first admission of the true cause of her misery, was hidden in the coverlet, the midnight waves of her hair falling like a pall over her.

So passed away ten days of Eleanor's visit, days so full of suppressed emotion and passionate feeling that they represented years in two lives.

"Not up yet, dear?" asked Eleanor one morning as she entered Felicia's room.

"My head aches," answered her friend, turning it restlessly on the pillow and lifting heavy eyes to Eleanor's face.

"I'm so sorry, dear; shall I bring you up some tea? And I'll tell the boys not to make a noise."

Felicia was subject to infrequent headaches, and with her customary unselfishness took them as matters of course when they came, and made no fuss.

Eleanor brought the tea.

"I'm afraid I shall not be able to get up to-day—anyhow till the evening," said Felicia, presently. "I'm sorry, because of the picnic; but it can't be helped."

"Of course, we shall put it off," began Eleanor; "it would be spoiled without you."

But Felicia would not hear of such a thing.

"No, no," she said; "I should be dreadfully sorry if it were put off; we shall have time for another before you go. Besides, you know—" she smiled faintly—"the house will be much quieter if the boys are away, and I shall be all right

by the evening, I hope. Take care of Will, Nell. Give him my love."

A faint flush rose in Eleanor's cheek, and for a second Felicia's heavy eyes dwelt on her with unusual earnestness, but she closed them without speaking.

It was a glorious day, the sea a vast expanse of varying blue, green, and purple, under a brilliant sky over which the soft breeze sent cloudy argosies, while it crested the long curves of the waves with just a line of snowy foam.

They had eaten their rustic dinner among a clump of trees in a field on the cliff-top, and now, with the access of spirits which satisfied hunger had imparted, various more or less precipitous and risky descents to the shore were being made by the boys, while the little girls picked out easier and more frequented paths. Dr. Gray had been carried off in triumph by the feminine portion of the party,

to which, to the boy's loudly-expressed disgust, Will Egerton also attached himself.

And so it fell out quite naturally, and without any conscious intent on either side, that presently he found himself walking by Eleanor's side.

The sweet sea-air, the sun, the sky, the spring of youth in her own strong heart, had all together combined to-day to help the girl. Under that glorious light and shadow, with the everlasting sky over her head, and the everlasting sea kissing the hem of the land, the terror that haunted the lonely watches of the night seemed to flee away, and she felt strong in the trust that the forgetfulness she prayed for must come—nay, almost able to believe that the feeling she dared not name was subsiding into nothing more ardent than honest friendship.

Strong in this hope she felt equal to talking to her companion as they walked, with a

natural ease she had long ceased to feel with him.

Dr. Gray and his girls were out of sight now, and Will and Eleanor on their downward path. Beneath them lay the red beach guarded by its red cliffs and washed by the incoming tide, and all around them was the sun-warmed air freshened by the soft breeze. The long ribbons at Eleanor's throat flew out upon it at moments like a ship's pennon and whipped it with a shrill music that rang in Will's ears for many a day to come. Suddenly one long streamer in its flight was blown across his breast and clung there. Eleanor laughed.

Will disengaged it gently and carrying it to his lips, kissed it reverently as the pilgrim kisses the relic from his shrine.

Eleanor did not laugh now; she turned her head as if she had not noticed the action; but she fell silent, and when Will ventured some small remark,

she answered a little at random.

They had reached the strand now, and Will held out his hand to aid her descent from the rock that formed its last step. As she laid hers in it their eyes met.

Both were pale, and there was a mute entreaty in the eyes of each—in his for forgiveness, in hers for silence.

They walked slowly and in silence along the shore, close under the overhanging red sandstone cliff, until Eleanor paused.

“Go on, please,” she said, very gently, but firmly; “I will sit down on one of these fallen rocks and wait until you all come back.”

He obeyed her without a word, and, turning away, had begun to follow the track of Dr. Gray and his little girls, who could be seen some distance beyond, when there was a strange, rending sound on the face of the cliff.

In the flash of an eye—before

the girl had time to realize what had happened—he had seized her in his arms and torn her away from her resting-place—even as a mass of the soft cliff fell, with a dull roar, upon the very spot, scattering fragments all around to the hem of her gown where she stood, clasped tight to Will's heaving breast, while words of passionate love burst incoherently from his white lips and his eyes devoured her pale face like a consuming flame.

She raised her eyes to his.

"You saved my life!" she whispered, tremblingly, and at the sound of her voice in his ears, and the passionate love on his face in her eyes, the whole world save themselves faded away, and their lips met in one long kiss.

It was the kiss that woke the sleeping Princess—but not to happiness now.

Eleanor awoke and tore herself out of the Prince's arms with a wild cry.

"Oh, what have I done?"

she wailed. "Oh, Felicia, my dear!"

Will fell at her feet, white and trembling.

"*You* have done nothing!" he cried; "it is I—I alone. Don't blame yourself!—only don't hate me! Oh, my dearest, my dearest—don't hate me!"

There was a call from beyond the curve of the shore. "Father! Will! Nell! Where the dickens have you all got to?" in Tom's most stentorian tones.

Eleanor looked at Will.

"Go to them, please," she said, faintly; "I will walk on after Dr. Gray and the girls."

The misery in his face made her heart tremble.

"I don't hate you," she said, very low; "only myself."

A quiver passed over the poor fellow's face. She turned and walked slowly onward.

In the merriment of the walk home in the twilight, the silence of two of the party passed almost unnoticed. The doctor, to whose

side Eleanor clung as if she felt his strong kind presence a protection and defence, looking at her pale face, said kindly, "Tired, my dear?" and on the girl's affirmative response, drew her hand through his arm in his fatherly fashion. Will loitered with the latest of the party, and when the whole family met in the dining-room, where Felicia, a little pale still, but her headache nearly gone, was waiting with her mother for supper with them, no one could have guessed what that much-belauded picnic had done for two of its members.

If in Felicia's eyes, as they fell on her lover and her friend, there still lingered something of the morning's inquiring gaze, it passed, and presently she was laughing with the merriest.

But the pitying moon has not often looked down on two more anguished young hearts than those that outwatched it that night under Dr. Gray's kindly roof at Dawlish.



VI.

AN APPEAL.

*"You know you never named his name to me—
You know I cannot give him up—ah God,
Not up now, even to you !"*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

LOOKED at from the point of view of the cynical student of human nature, there may possibly be a humorous side to the fashion in which the conventionalities of civilized life enforce a strict adherence to their received formulas as pitilessly when the heart is racked with torment or heavy with anguish as when all goes merrily with it ; but the experience is apt to be the reverse of humorous or pleasing to the sufferer.

Eleanor Lambert never knew by what force she lived through the two days after that fatal picnic; how she sat at table with her friend and her friend's lover, and asked one for the salt and the other for bread—salt that might well symbolize the tears that flooded her heart but must not rise to her eyes, and bread that choked her as she tried to swallow. enough to prevent kindly notice of her want of appetite. In that large and merry party there was a chance of silence—broken by feverish bursts of assumed mirth—passing unheeded, at least for a time.

She never looked at Will, and knew all the more vividly when his appealing eyes were on her. She avoided him persistently, never giving him a chance of a word alone with her, yet felt with an anguish as of a sword through her heart that his was suffering no less.

When she thought of Felicia she was torn with feelings mingled

of remorseful love and pity, and a torturing consciousness of some new shade of expression in her friend's blue eyes that told of awakening—what? She dared not think what.

So two miserable days passed—days of those that sap the heart's strength and mock at life itself. The third morning the boys were all agog over a plan for walking to Exeter, sleeping there, and walking back the next day. Will must come, too; Felicia could well spare him for one day, they were sure. Eleanor felt the swift glance of his eyes on her face; but she gave no sign. He went.

The morning had been heavy and unusually hot, and the feminine portion of the family had felt content with bathing and afterward lounging on the sand in company with the doctor, while Mrs. Gray lay on her sofa at home and complained feebly of the heat. But during the mid-day dinner clouds began to rise and gather, slowly at first, then

more swiftly, until the greater part of the heavens was a mass of lurid purple. Then there sprang up the sudden cool breeze so generally the precursor of a thunderstorm—to pass away again as suddenly. A distant rumble was heard—then another and another—nearer and louder. Then the cloud-rack was cleft by a great quivering flash, and the storm was upon them.

For an hour it blazed and crashed, now nearer, now farther, while the rain came down in sheets; and then, little by little, it died away as it had come; the blue sky laughed out again; the sun shone, and in his rays the remnants of the great vault of cloud turned once more into airy vapor, so whitely innocent that it seemed ungenerous to look upon them as belated skirmishers from that thunderous cloud-army.

During the storm the inhabitants of the sea-side villa had behaved after their various kinds. The

doctor, who thoroughly enjoyed a thunderstorm and whose inclination would have led him to watch its grand movements from the window, sat by his wife's sofa, holding her hand, since the poor lady had an intense dread of lightning, and cried out at every flash. The younger members of the family shared in greater or less degree their father's fearlessness, and Eleanor, as she sat at her bedroom window, felt a certain strain of—not comfort, perhaps, but satisfaction, in the clash of the great forces of Nature which appealed to the trouble within her.

There was a light knock at the door.

“May I come in, Nell?” said Felicia's voice.

A spasm passed over Eleanor's face.

“Of course!” she answered, and her friend entered.

Felicia drew a chair to the window and sat down, but she did not speak for a moment,

The silence began to thrill in Eleanor's ears.

"The storm is almost over," she said; "we shall have a lovely evening."

"Yes," said Felicia, no more; and Eleanor heard the blood ticking in her brain during the pause that followed—so strong was her instinctive foreboding of approaching trouble.

"Nell," said Felicia at last, very gently, but with an appealing intonation in the little endearing name that held a whole history; "Nell, dear, I want to say—I want to ask you—something."

Nell's heart stood still for a second, and her hands grew cold; she could have died gratefully that moment. But Felicia paused once more, and she must speak.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, in a voice that seemed to herself to come from quite a different part of the room.

"Nell," Felicia began again, but now her voice had lost its

firmness and trembled piteously; "Nell, you are a thousand times better, and cleverer, and more beautiful than I am; it is natural that—people—should see that, and admire and—like—you. But—I love him! Oh, Nell, Nell! I love him so dearly! Don't—don't take him from me!" Her voice broke into sobbing.

But Eleanor was on her knees before her, her arms around her, and Felicia's head fell on her shoulder.

Then Eleanor spoke, and her voice was like a solemn psalm.

"Felicia," she said, "God is my witness that I will never take him from you—that I will never do you wrong or repay your dear love with treachery. My dear, my darling! It is you who are a thousand times better than I! You who are so good, so generous, so forgiving!"

Her voice failed, and the two girls clung yet closer together.

At last Felicia raised her head and smiled a tremulous smile,

and they kissed each other with a long kiss.

“My dear old Nell !” she said, “we will never speak of it again.”

When her friend had left her alone, Eleanor knelt and cried with passionate prayer for strength to do right—for help to be worthy of the love and trust of the friend so true and generous that they had not failed in that sharpest ordeal. The past was irrevocable—she could not alter it or her remorse for her share in it ; but again and again she registered her vow that, whatever the cost to herself or Will—ah, the sting of *that* thought !—she would prove in the future not unworthy of that dearest, sweetest friend.

If only she might go—go home to Cousin Nancy—away from this bewildering pain and divided loyalty ! But what excuse could she find for shortening her visit without arousing suspicions in the minds of either her hosts or her cousin ? Well, Will was away till to-morrow night ; before

then, perhaps, some reasonable excuse might present itself to her mind.

The excuse did present itself, but not in any of the possible forms over which Eleanor had pondered in the sleepless hours of the night.

On her plate at breakfast she found a letter from Allersley, and opened it hurriedly, seeing that instead of Cousin Nancy's still firm and masculine handwriting, it bore Hannah's prim characters.

"Dear Miss Eleanor," she read, "I think it my duty to inform you that my mistress is far from as I should wish. She was took with a specious of faint last night, and I have kep her to bed to-day. I could have desired as Dr. Gray was here, not as Dr. Thomas is not a clever gentleman in his way, no doubt, but I don't hold much with young men. Miss Eleanor, my dear mistress send her love, and you are not to

hurry, but she must confest she would like to see you. Do come home, my dear.

“Yours respectfully,

“HANNAH PRINT.”

Eleanor's face blanched as she read. It was not the actual facts the letter told her that paled her cheek, so much as the simple fact of Cousin Nancy letting her hear of her illness through the faithful Hannah; for she knew how her tender guardian would shrink from alarming her without dire necessity. Moreover, under the stilted wording of the missive, above all in the relaxation of the old servant's dignity in adding an endearment to her mistress's title, Eleanor read a solicitude on Hannah's part that boded ill. She handed the letter to Dr. Gray without a word, and sat silent and shivering as he read it. His face grew grave.

“I must go directly!” Eleanor broke out; “by the first train! Oh, Dr. Gray, what can it

be? Oh, Cousin Nancy, Cousin Nancy!"

The doctor had passed on the letter to his daughter.

"Felicia, dear," he said, as she finished it and then put her arm tenderly round her friend, "just pack my bag, will you? We have time to catch the express. I will go up and explain to your mother. Nell, my dear child, don't look so white and frightened; very likely it is nothing. Come, drink a cup of coffee and eat something, like the brave girl you are, and then get together any small things you want. Don't bother about anything else. Felicia will send everything after you. We shall find my dear old friend ready to laugh at us for coming, I daresay."

"Are you really coming, too, Dr. Gray? Oh, how good you are!"

"Why, you didn't think I was not going to my old friend Anne Escote, when she wanted me?" began Dr. Gray with some

emotion, and then turned it off with a laugh, "and going to leave my *locum tenens* in Hannah's clutches!"

Eleanor managed a faint smile.

The two girls held each other in a close embrace as Eleanor started.

"Say good-by for me to—the others—when they come back," she said, bravely; and Felicia kissed assent.






VII.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

"Mine honor keeps the weather of my fate."

—TROILUS AND CRYSIDA.

FORTNIGHT had passed since the evening when, at sight of her darling's face, and the touch of her tender kisses, Anne Escote's dim eyes had filled with the light of joy and love; while under her playful rebukes of the doctor for his want of faith in any one but himself being able to treat her properly, her old friend read a great relief in his presence, and a knowledge of possible danger

to herself that she would fain conceal from the girl as long as might be.

| In a few days, to all appearance, she had almost regained her usual health, and, although her active habits were perforce laid by for the present, she was so unaffectedly cheerful and bright, that Eleanor's heart would have felt at ease about her, but for the fact that Dr. Gray utterly refused to rejoin his family at Dawlish. He was so light of it himself, saying it was too long a journey to make more than three times in one month—that, having once got back to his work, he felt too much drawn to it to leave it again—that he must stay to protect poor young Mr. Thomas from Hannah, and so on.

But when he made these excuses, while Eleanor, with the quick comprehension of love, knew in her secret heart that her cousin felt grateful for his decision in spite of her having urged him to go, a sick appre-

hension she dared not face shook her at moments.

The thought of Will kept bravely out of sight was beginning to fade, she prayed, under the pressure of anxiety for the dearest friend of all her life. Never, never, she vowed to herself, should that dearest friend's loving heart be troubled by the knowledge of her darling's past anguish and lapse from the high standard of honor she had learned of her—never, at least, while she was not her usual strong self. Some day, perhaps, when Will and Felicia were married, and she had outlived the last pang of the serpent-pain that had twined round her heart, she would confess to that tenderest and noblest soul how far she had fallen from the heights of loyalty, and in the counsel of that reverend experience gain future strength. But not now.

The last days of September were at hand. The Gray family were to return early in October.

Will was to leave a few days earlier to join a friend's shooting party in Sussex, Felicia had written. Her letters were as frank and loving as of old; no trace of any haunting memory of her appeal to Nell could be read between the lines—nothing but affectionate sympathy for her friend's anxiety, and joy that her father had decided to allay that anxiety by remaining at Allersley; although Nell knew she missed him greatly, and his absence caused the whole burden of Mrs. Gray's exacting fretfulness to fall on her shoulders.

“How much more generous—how much better in every way she is than I!” Eleanor said again and again to her own sad heart.

One afternoon, after Miss Escote had been promoted from her bedroom to her pleasant upstairs parlor—the room in which more than twenty-one years ago she had read Dick Lambert's dying letter—she and Dick Lam-

bert's daughter sat talking, Cousin Nancy in the great arm-chair drawn near the bright fire—for her illness had made her chilly—and Eleanor on a stool at her feet, her beautiful head against the old woman's knee, and one hand holding the thin aged one that lay upon her neck.

The girl's face was turned toward the fire, and if the leaping flames reflected themselves in eyes that were filled from time to time with a tragic sadness, they told no tales.

There had been silence for a space.

"Eleanor, my darling," said Miss Escote, at last, "I want to talk to you a little."

A horrible pang contracted Eleanor's heart; the words bore so painful a likeness to those Felicia had used so short a time ago, and seemed to presage as great a calamity.

She turned her cheek against the hand she held, and Miss Escote heard her quickly-caught breath.

•

"My dear," she went on, "you have been my dearest joy, my greatest comfort—more to me than words can say—ever since the day of your birth. I want you always to remember that. But, my child, sooner or later we must part."

A sob broke from Eleanor, and she cried passionately:

"Oh, Cousin Nancy! Cousin Nancy! Don't say it! It may be—it *will* be—a long time—"

"My darling! it *may* be; but somehow I think it will not. Don't sob so, my dearest; be my brave Eleanor. God may let me be with you a little while still. But, my child, while I have the strength and the sense, I want to say a few words to you about your future. Can you listen now?"

Eleanor fought down her sobs, and assented brokenly.

"You have always known," Miss Escote went on, "that this dear home passes into distant hands at my death. I hope you

have guessed—although I fear you have never been worldly-wise enough to disturb your mind about it," she continued, with a smile that drew another sob from the girl, "that I should not leave you unprovided for. You will always have a sufficient income, though you will not be an heiress."

"Oh, don't! don't!" whispered Eleanor.

"I would spare you the pain, my darling, if I could; but it is right you should know. There, now we have done with business. But there is something else. Eleanor, you must not think it means anything worse than that it is right for an old woman who has had her warning to put her affairs in order; but I have been talking over things with my dear and kind old friend, Donald Gray. He said in his fine, manly way, that of course your home must be with them; he loved you as his own daughter. It comforted me greatly when he

said it; but, Eleanor dear, I have been thinking it over since, and I am not so sure. You see, when Felicia is married, things will be very different, and I have a strong presentiment that Mrs. Gray would not altogether welcome you. Men don't always see these things in the same light as women. What do you think, dear?"

Eleanor felt how deep and urgent was the anxiety in her cousin's mind, and her own brave spirit rose and beat down the anguish of hearing her discuss a future wherein she should no longer be able to cherish and guard her darling, and enabled her to answer with some show of calmness.

"I think you are right, Cousin Nancy dear. ("If I might tell her why it must never, never be my home!" she cried, in her heart.) I don't think Mrs. Gray *would* like it. She has never been very fond of me, you know; she thinks you spoiled me. And so you did!

my dear, dear, dearest ! And so I don't know how to live without you ! ”

Then she dried her eyes once more, and spoke more firmly.

“ I am a wretch to cry and make you miserable,” she said ; “ let me hold your hand tight, and I won't again.”

“ My dearest child ! ” murmured Miss Escote.

“ There, now I'm going to be brave,” said Eleanor. “ Cousin Nancy, when—if—when I have to part with you, I think I will ask Mrs. Graham to take me in. I have often laughed at her and made fun of her ; but she is good and kind—good and kind enough to be very fond of me in spite of my laughing at her to her face sometimes ; and she is alone in the world. I think she would like to have me ; and she is—so unlike—you, that it would be best——”

The last incoherent words came in sobs. But Miss Escote understood the passionate

loyalty to herself that prompted them.

There was another silence while she laid her disengaged hand on the girl's hair, and determined to write that very night a few words to Mrs. Graham, asking her if, in the event of her not distant death, she would feel inclined for her sake, and the sake of the girl herself, to give Eleanor the shelter of her house and protection.

"I think you are right, darling," she said. "Mary Graham is a good woman, and kind-hearted, and she will give you a cordial welcome, I feel sure, and a home until—as I pray—you make the happiness and beauty of some good man's. Ah, my dear! to think I shall not see it or him! No; don't cry, my own dear, don't cry. I ought not to have said it. I have had so many blessings."

Silence again, while Eleanor fondled the thin hand she held.

"Eleanor," began Miss Escote

presently, "once upon a time I loved your father very dearly. Did you ever guess it?"

"I have thought it might have been so," whispered the girl. "Tell me, dear Cousin Nancy."

And so for the first time in all the years that had gone by since the days, in Eden, Anne Escote told—told to the child of the man she had loved—that old tale. Told, in tender words that passed lightly over her lover's forgiven faults, and paused upon his graces and talents, on to the end and to the story of the girl's own beautiful young mother, whose memory Anne had kept fragrant in her child's heart.

"Poor Cousin Nancy!" sighed Eleanor, when the story was ended.

"No, not poor, dear—richer far than I ever dreamed of being. Eleanor, when Dick and I meet yonder, I shall say to him from a full heart that if he caused me some little suffering of old,

he has made me overflowing amends for it in giving me his daughter."

"Now, dear," she added, a little later, "you have been indoors all day. Go out and breathe the pure, fresh air a while. Hannah will be only too happy, dear soul, to sit with me. I won't talk any more; I feel a little tired."

Eleanor took her way across the Common. Its broad, open expanse drew her to-night with the sense of space which the wounded soul needs at moments. There are minds that under pressure of joy or trouble crave for such space—solitary and wild—to move in; the immeasurable leagues of ocean, the empty sky, the wind-swept moors, speak to them a language their spirit understands.

Eleanor walked slowly across the deserted common—her eyes fixed on the golden glow the sunset had left behind it, wherein the evening star had hung its

slowly-brightening lamp—a great sense of loss and pain, a passion of love for her cousin rising and falling within her.

In the distance a yellow spark was beginning to glimmer from a cottage window here and there in the village ; a carrier's cart—its tarpaulin curtain floating out behind it like some gigantic bird outlined against the glow—jogged along the road.

Eleanor walked on until the glow faded and the stars brightened into fuller radiance. Then she turned homeward once more. In the southeast, tangled in a web of mournful cloud, a misshapen moon showed a dim and fateful radiance, like a battered shield of tarnished silver. A man's figure, indistinct in the dying light, was approaching her along the path.

What instinct brought that irresistible quiver to the girl's brave spirit—fearless of any danger in that well-known spot?

“You!” she cried, with the

cry of a trapped bird, as Will Egerton stood before her.

For a moment they faced each other in the dusk, silent and motionless. Then Will spoke, and his very voice seemed changed.

"Nell," he said, quietly, but with an accent of strongly-repressed passion that pierced the girl's very heart, "I suppose you mean me to understand that—what happened—my madness—was to be between us as if it had never been——"

He paused, unable to go on, and Eleanor dragged a faint "Yes" to her lips, in answer to his implied question.

"Well, I have tried," he went on, beginning to lose control over his voice; I have tried—God knows how I have tried—and I can't! No, don't go—in God's name let me speak! Let us talk it over and find some way out of this hideous labyrinth. Nell, if it were only myself — if you didn't — oh Nell!

forgive me, dear, for what I did in my madness; but if we love one another——”

Then Nell found words.

“Will,” she said, in a voice as soft and sad, and as strong in its softness as the western air that breathed around them—and it was the first time he had heard the name from her lips—“Will, it is like dying now, and I will answer you as if we were dying in truth. I do love you. But I have vowed before God that I will never—*never*—play the traitor to the woman who has been my friend since we were little children together. I have vowed to God—and her—that I will never take you away from her.”

“To her?” stammered Will.

“Yes, to her. Thank God, she does not know—she never shall—how far my disloyalty to her had gone; but she felt something was wrong. The day you went, she appealed to me—oh, Will, so gently, so generously,

so lovingly!—she begged me not to take you away from her. Oh, Will, *dear* Will! don't tempt me! I would never—never—have told you this but to show you how good, how worthy of your love she is. You and I—oh, you and I!—we are not half worthy of her;—but you will be, won't you? You will—forget me!” (Will broke into a wild sob.) “You will make her happy!”

The wind went by with a long sigh; the moon had hidden her pale face behind the veiling cloud; the silence palpitated with passion and pain.

Then Will spoke once more.

“This is your irrevocable decision?” he asked, hoarsely.

Eleanor bowed her head.

“Yes,” she said; and then, “Oh, Will! forgive me the pain!”

Will's voice broke as he answered.

“I have nothing to forgive. You are an angel—and I am—a

man—that's all. I will try to obey you—I will try to make her happy—what does it matter about myself? Dear, let me hold your sweet hand in mine once more—just once—see, I am quiet now—and tell me you forgive me; and—I'll go."

Eleanor put her hand in his, unhesitatingly.

"I say as you did—I have nothing to forgive. Good-by, Will, and God bless and help you now and always."

Will bent and put his lips to the hand in his, without a word, and then, with an inarticulate, strangled sound as of words that could not force their way up from his swollen heart, he turned and disappeared in the twilight.

Two days later Anne Escote passed painlessly from a gentle sleep to the healing sleep of death, and Eleanor Lambert was alone.



VIII.

SEHNSUCHT.

*"Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in life, the days that are no
more."*

—ALFRED TENNYSON.



ANNE ESCOTE had been laid beside her father and mother and the little brothers and sisters in the beautiful old country churchyard at Allersley ten years, and Eleanor Lambert was still with Mrs. Graham.

After the first overwhelming grief, when Dr. Gray had insisted on taking her home to

Felicia's tender care for a time, she had shown a feverish eagerness to begin her new life that was naturally attributed to the keen sense of loss and her anxiety to leave the neighborhood of her old home, where already an army of workmen were painting and papering anew the rooms she knew and loved so well.

Mrs. Graham had hailed the idea of her residence with her with delight, and in a few weeks the girl, her pale face the paler for her black dress, and her dark eyes wide with suppressed emotion, was established as a welcome inmate of the comfortable house at Kensington, which was the scene of Mrs. Graham's flights of fancy in bewildering changes of taste and fashion in furnishing, which kept pace with equally perplexing changes in the nature of the objects of her temporary devotion in literature, art, music, and science; each of which claimed her sole adherence

at revolving periods of different duration. It mattered little that she knew as little of each and all of these matters as a woman of limited capacity might well do. She dressed herself in them as she put on her gown and bonnet, and from the same motive—they were fashionable.

But if her head were not of the strongest, her heart was unmistakably good, and she gave a very warm and large share of it to the beautiful girl who had sought and found a home with her.

It would not be for long, people said. With a face like that, and a very comfortable little income of her own, it was not likely that Mrs. Graham's young friend would remain on her hands long. But the months and years went by, and—spite of many admirers, and maybe a lover or two—Eleanor Lambert was Eleanor Lambert still.

She lived to all appearance the life of the ordinary woman of her day; she took her share in the

usual benevolent and parochial "good works;" she played her part in the gayeties of Mrs. Graham's circle, and won a place in many hearts by a certain gentle strength that was always ready to rush out in help and comfort. Her eyes filled with tragic splendor, or softened to tender beauty at music; she laughed and wept at the play, and held her own among her fellows in the paths her steps had fallen on. If there were anything wanting to her life, she never complained; if her brave bearing hid unhealed wounds; if her laugh might sometimes have been more rightly tears;—well, she was like many another woman.

So it came to pass that by the gradually tightening bonds of custom, the mutual life went on unaltered from year to year. It was certain that to Mrs. Graham a break in it would have been unwelcome; and if there were moments when Eleanor's spirit,

trained in Anne Escote's bracing, vivifying atmosphere, felt cramped and prisoned in the narrower one she now breathed, there never came a moment when it seemed to her right or kind to propose a permanent change.

The passing years had deprived her of the loved and trusted friend of her youth. Dr. Gray had left his large family to mourn the loss of the best and tenderest of fathers, and, since they seemed to inherit mostly from him, to carry on his gentle and loving forbearance to their mother's weakness.

Since that day Eleanor had never revisited the home of her youth, for Mrs. Gray and her children removed to Edinburgh after the doctor's death, and Eleanor had made her first acquaintance with that glorious city in her visit to them.

Hannah Print, made independent by her beloved mistress's bequest to her, had not been long in following her. The new

owners flourished at High Trees ; but Eleanor Lambert was but a name to them, and the dear old home remained among the unchanged and undying memories of the past.

And Felicia ?

In her husband's northern home, among the Yorkshire wolds, Felicia had spent the ten years of her married life with but a very occasional visit to London, where dwelt her friend. On those rare occasions the two women met with all their old affection. Hand in hand and knee to knee they sat and talked of everything in the world—but just one very near each heart.

Will's name was never shirked between them. Eleanor listened to the wife's account of his doings ; his craze for improvements on his land, and among his tenants ; his horse and cattle-breeding ; his growing distaste for town life, and his love for the country—and made due comment on it all.

But from the evening when she and her despairing lover had bidden each other farewell on Allersley Common, they had never met.

Her cousin's recent death had been more than enough excuse for her absence at her friend's wedding, and although Felicia had proved her noble trust in husband and friend by urging the latter to pay them a visit, it may be she had felt grateful for Eleanor's carefully-worded letter of excuse, and instinctively shrank from a renewal of the invitation. Her hopes of motherhood, more than once disappointed, had been at last fulfilled. Felicia was one of the myriads of women in whom the love and longing for children is stronger than any other love or longing, and in proportion to her grief at the failure of her hopes was her delight in the healthy and lovely boy who, two years since, had come to bless her, and to bring back something of the

old boyish brightness into Will Egerton's face—which had grown grave of late years.

Of this baby - boy — of his beauty, his intelligence, his daily growth in all delightfulness, his father's devotion to him — Felicia's letters, were full, and if she had not feared the change from the clear air of his native country to London's smoky atmosphere, she could scarce have resisted the temptation to bring him for her friend's approval and sympathetic delight.

So the days slipped away until a change came, and something — she knew not what — woke 'up in Eleanor Lambert's heart, and would not be stilled to sleep.

Why is it, will any adept in the science of the soul tell, that however sternly one may turn one's back upon the past, and bury it out of sight, however firmly one may close the book of life, one day there comes, from none knows where, a little breeze of memory, and the buried past

is alive once more, and the closed book opens, and one by one its leaves flutter back, and there, clear as on the day they were printed, lie beneath the aching eyes the old, old stories—the tales of love and loss, and failed hopes, and foiled endeavor—the records of the days that are no more?

How did it happen that, after ten years of more or less successful effort to walk straight along the narrow path of duty without strayings of the heart into the old by-ways that had been so dear and fatal, there came a day when Eleanor Lambert felt that her strength was gone, and her heart a waste of desolation, wherein walked the specters of the past, and refused to be laid?

What was altered in the daily course of her life, that she should feel all at once that it had become unbearable? And yet so it was.

Mrs. Graham's vagrant fancy, revolving in its eccentric orbit,

had recurred once more to music as its deity—a phase that in its effects brought benefit to Eleanor; for while it lasted, they haunted concert-rooms, where Eleanor sat entranced, while Mrs. Graham's enthusiastic comments, couched in the jargon of the hour, more or less hid from herself as well as others the fact that she was inexpressibly bored, and that the music which really delighted her, and set her kind old head in its irreproachable cap wagging, was the weakly sentimental ballad concerning the sailors that never come home, the choristers that never grow up, or the aunts and other female relatives that live and die unwed; which ballads her avowed adherence to the higher forms of the art obliged her to disdain.

But to Eleanor the music was the spell which set her soul free—with the magic of a joy that is like anguish.

What a power, what a mystery

that same magic of music is! The music of the spheres! the heavenly harpers of Paradise! the angelic host chanting their hymns of rejoicing! What do they all mean to us mortals, whose earthly music at its sweetest "tells of saddest thought," and whose noblest songs of triumph evoke a passion that is quenched in tears? No; the music of heaven must needs be very different to that which lifts the soul into space from this low earth, or spirits but lately flown into those higher regions must surely miss the accustomed yearning in the strains, or endow them with it.

It was in the last days of June, and the two were present at a magnificent performace of Berlioz's "Faust."

Eleanor had been sitting spell-bound, as Marguerite's last song, instinct and alive with its passionate longing for her lost lover—to see him but for a moment—to die with his kiss on her lips—

thrilled and shook the silence ; her eyes shining and dilated ; her lips just parted with fluttering breath ; every pulse rising and falling with the strains, and a passion of despairing sympathy in her heart.

The song ended, leaving a pulsating vibration in the air. Mrs. Graham forgot her *rôle* for a moment.

“My dear,” she whispered, audibly, after the burst of applause which followed the song had subsided, “did you notice Madame Sombra’s dress? That kind of classical upper drapery would just suit you.”

“No, I didn’t notice it,” stammered Eleanor, brought back bewilderingly to earth.

It was unpleasant, but by no means so unusual a performance on her old friend’s part—for had she not smiled good-humoredly a hundred times over similar downfalls?—that Eleanor should feel so fierce a revolt in her soul as to make her tremble.

But her troubles for that day were not yet over.

That evening Mrs. Graham was to entertain some friends, and it chanced that one of the guests—a girl with a sweet, fresh young voice—among other songs chose the simple little ballad of the parted lovers that Felicia had sung years ago at Dawlish.

As Eleanor listened, the room around her with its occupants faded away; those old days stood up alive once more, and she was walking with Will upon the cliffs; her ribbon fluttered across his breast; he tore her from beneath the falling rock; his arms were round her—and the tears were running down her face.

Fortunately she was in the shadow of a curtain, and before the song was over, and attention turned her way, she had slipped from the room to recover her composure.

But that night, as she sat at

the window, looking out into the summer sky, which even London air could not rob of its star-sprinkled depths, even until the dawn appeared in the east, the waves of memory broke the bounds she had built for them, and flooded her soul.

In the end, when memory had done its worst, and the waters had gone over her head, there came a yearning to see once more the old home, the house where she was born, where her mother had died, and Cousin Nancy had been father and mother and all the world to her; to climb the steep churchyard path, and lay her head upon Cousin Nancy's grave, as she had laid it in her lap of old; a longing so intense that it seemed impossible to delay its fulfillment until morning. But when once she had made her plan and settled its details, weariness came over her, and she crept to bed, and slept till the maid entered.

After the first morning greet-

ing, Eleanor broke the proposition to her hostess without delay.

"I am thinking of going down to Allersley to-day," she began.

"To Allersley!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham. "For the day! Such a journey as that? You never told me you were thinking of going there!"

"I have only thought of it since last night," answered Eleanor, with a smile. "I have taken a sudden fancy to see the old place again, and the weather is so beautiful," she finished, lamely.

"But such a journey in one day!" expostulated Mrs. Graham.

"I think of staying a night, or perhaps two, at Hollisford, since I am not sure of finding accommodation at Allersley. The 'King's Head' used to be the best hotel; I daresay it is still."

"But, my dear, you are too young and too good-looking to be going about to hotels by yourself; do consider."

Eleanor laughed.

“I am not so young or so good-looking as all that,” she said. “Don’t be afraid, dear Mrs. Graham. I will be very discreet. It is a very respectable and homely old place, if I remember rightly. We used to have our parcels left there when we drove in from Allersley for shopping. It is in the Market Place, if there should be any letters to send on to me.”

So Eleanor had her way, and that afternoon, having taken her room at the old inn in the old town that looked so familiar and yet so strange, she hired a carriage and was driven along the country road, whose every curve she knew by heart, to the village which was still the dearest spot on earth to her.

And now, when she had reached it and dismissed the carriage with orders to wait at the village inn for her return at no fixed hour, her heart trembled with a vague unwillingness to seek at

once the goal of her sudden journey—an instinctive shrinking from the sight of alterations she might find in that beloved home; and leaving the village at the end farthest from High Trees, she loitered for an hour among the blossoming hedgerows of the embowered lanes, now and again leaning on gates where she had leaned of old, gazing with dim eyes over meadows in which the hay-makers were at work, at the far-off spires of the distant town, and living over again with sharp pangs of loss and grief the days of childhood and youth.

At last she turned back, and wending her way through the village, beneath the old church, high up among its graves, past the inn, and the forge, and the school-house, she turned into the little lane, from which she knew that across a bit of meadow-land she should gain the nearest view of the old house, amid its tall elms, to be had without approaching its entrance

more closely than she felt inclined to do.

She had reached the well-remembered gate in the hedge now; but for a moment she laid her head on its topmost bar and hid her eyes—she dared not look.

Then once more she stood erect, and then she was clutching the gate hard, and gazing and gazing as if she knew not how to tear away her eyes.

There, unchanged, its mellow walls glōwing in the golden light, surrounded by its immemorial elms, it stood, its twisted chimneys breathing here and there a light haze of opaline vapor that told of habitation and domestic life—and home! Not her home ever again!

Above the slender feathery heads of the uncultivated meadow-grass before her fluttered a myriad of tiny wings, their gauzy films aglow in the sun's level beams, the whole field enchanted into magical beauty.

But Eleanor's eyes, unheeding, never left the house.

It was not of Will Egerton she thought now, nor of love or love's failure; it was of Cousin Nancy—Cousin Nancy, in her black gown and her soft laces, walking over the smooth sward of that lawn; Cousin Nancy, holding the little hand that clung to her, and leading the childish steps to the small plot that was to be the child's very own; Cousin Nancy, the dearest, noblest, tenderest soul in all the world.

There, across the common behind her, ran the path where Will and she had said their last farewell; but she would not tread it afresh to-night; to-morrow, perhaps, she would return and make that sad pilgrimage. To-night no memory—not even of Will—should reign beside the thought of Cousin Nancy.

At last, with lingering eyes, she tore herself away from the gate and retraced the lane.

When she climbed the church-path and took her way, amid graves she had known of her life, and newer ones that had arisen since her time, to the well-known corner where, among many dead and gone Escotes, her own mother and Cousin Nancy lay side by side.

There she knelt and laid her cheek to the dear name, and dropped her head upon the turf and kissed it with fast falling tears.

When she rose, and, having found the carriage, drove through the sweet June twilight back to the town, she felt that in that outburst of long-pent-up grief and pain, something of the overwhelming bitterness at her heart had passed away—as if in truth she had laid her head on Cousin Nancy's lap.



IX.

“THE REST IS SILENCE.”

*“I end with—‘Love is all and Death is
nought!’ quoth she.”*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

MY DEAREST NELL,
—Will has had a bad
fall from his horse.
They tell me there is
no hope. He wants
to see you. Come as
soon as possible.

“Your loving

“FELICIA.”

Such was the letter—directed
to her at Kensington and re-
addressed in Mrs. Graham’s
writing—that Eleanor Lambert
found awaiting her when she
went down to breakfast on the

morning after her visit to Allersley.

The blow was so crushing in its suddenness that for the moment she felt no pain. It was not until she had torn the meaning out of the railway guide, and discovered that there was a train in half an hour which, by slow stages and many changings of line on its tortuous way, would enable her to reach the station nearest to the Egertons' Yorkshire home by six o'clock, that she began to feel the agony of life creeping back to her benumbed heart. But she must not let herself think of it yet. Not until the telegram, telling Felicia of the delay in her receiving her letter and announcing her coming, had been written and dispatched; not until in the solitary compartment she had bribed the guard of the train to reserve for her sole tenancy, she felt the iron wheels beneath begin to grind their hoarse tune, did she dare to face the calamity

Felicia's few words had told with so overpowering a simplicity.

"Will dying—Will dying!" The words set themselves to the song of the wheels and beat in her brain. "He wants to see you—he wants to see you." After ten years—and this the end of all!

The fire in her brain burned up the tears. And through the long hours, as meadow and wood and stream and hedgerow slipped past her; through maddening waitings at dreary wayside stations, and only less maddening creepings of long-expected trains; even until passing imperceptibly into the wider and wilder scenery of the Yorkshire wolds, one agonizing longing mingled with and overpowered every other feeling—that she might only be in time!

The delay in the delivery of Felicia's letter had been so short—only a few hours. Only a few hours—but hours to the dying, how much they mean!

Her thoughts circled and circled round that terror until it grew a black blot before her eyes and the wheels took up their refrain once more. "He wants to see you—he wants to see you." And then out of the past arose the ghostly vision of another journey, and the cruel wheels changed their song. "Will Egerton, at your service," they beat out in their iron music, repeating the words, now louder, now softer, until Eleanor was fain to fall on her knees and pray them to cease.

The sun was declining toward the west when at last that terrible journey came to an end, and the train stopped at a small wayside station. As Eleanor alighted, a groom approached her, and touching his hat, asked if she were the lady for Wakeford Manor; and on her assent, he led the way to a dog-cart which stood waiting, and in a couple of minutes they were bowling swiftly along the road.

Sick dread of what the answer might so probably be froze the question that was racking Eleanor's heart. The man kept the deferential silence of his kind.

Eleanor's pale lips parted once—twice, but no sound would come. The third time her voice obeyed her.

"Mr. Egerton—" she began; "is he——"

"Very bad, ma'am," said the groom, with an accent of sorrow in the words that somehow sent a faint ray of comfort into the tortured heart of the woman beside him. "He can't last the night, they tell me."

A choked gasp was the only comment.

A long gray house—its many windows aglow with the sun's rays—came in sight; a pretty child at the lodge-gates dropped a curtsy to the lady as she passed, and as the dog-cart drew up at the foot of the long flight of stone steps and Eleanor

alighted, Felicia appeared at the hall door, and the friends were in each other's arms, without a word from either.

Felicia drew her friend into a pretty morning-room entered from the great hall, and then for a moment Eleanor clung to her with a passionate embrace, before they stood apart and looked into each other's faces—Felicia's pale and worn with grief and watching, Eleanor's dark anguished eyes making hers seem ashen in hue.

There was silence for a space, then Eleanor spoke painfully.

"There was never so generous a woman on the face of the earth as you, Felicia."

A wan smile flickered over the wife's white face.

"That is what Will said—and bade God bless me for it—when I told him this morning of my letter to you and your telegram. I dared not until I knew you were really coming. Ah, Nell dear! what a mess we have

made of it all between us! I wonder, if I had had any proper pride in those old days—if I had let him go—how it would have ended.”

Eleanor gave a wild moan.

“Oh, my dear, my dear! Don’t, don’t!” she cried. “I wish I had died then to spare you this!”

Felicia’s arm went round her.

“Nell,” she said, very gently, “you and I loved each other long years before we either of us knew Will Egerton existed. Dear, don’t let us exaggerate. Don’t pity me too much. I have had some happiness. You don’t suppose Will could ever be anything but tenderness and gentleness itself to his wife? If I have known that—I was not—always—first in his love—” She paused and sighed pathetically. “Well, I could always trust him utterly, and how many wives can say that?”

She softly turned Eleanor’s face toward her own,

"No, Nell," she went on, "I think after all you have had the worst of it, for I have the child."

"Yes, thank God! you have the child," echoed Eleanor, with the solemn ardor of a prayer.

"I suppose I am very feeble and poor-spirited," said Felicia, after another pause, and with again the faint, wan smile; "but I couldn't help it. He suffered so terribly the first day, Nell—he scarcely knew what he was saying. But when I heard him once or twice whispering your name—'Nell! Nell!'—it was as if my little Donald were ill and in pain, and crying for something I could give him. I couldn't help it, Nell; I *wanted* him so dreadfully to *have* what he wanted before he died."

"Felicia!" cried Eleanor—no more; but the single word vibrated with a passion of love and worship.

"Dr. Lomax has not left him since," said Felicia. "Will has

seemed to be in a sort of uneasy sleep the greater part of the afternoon, and he took no notice when I came away to meet you. But he may wake any moment. Come up-stairs with me and take off your hat and bathe your poor face, and I will go in and see if he is awake. ”

Ten minutes passed and Felicia came.

“He is awake and conscious,” she said, “but very weak. Come, Nell dear, I have told him you are here.”

“Nell ! ”

“Will, oh, Will ! ”

No more words, but a long, long gazing into each other’s eyes—a silence that told everything.

The last crimson glow of sunset flushed the cheek of the dying man and cast a glory on the woman’s raven hair where she knelt beside him ; but their eyes never fell from that intense unspoken speech.

The glow faded, and with a sob Eleanor's head fell forward on the hand she held.

Then Will spoke.

"It was—well worth—dying for," he panted.

They were Will Egerton's last words.



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